The Crucible of War, 1939-1945 GREENHOUS / HARRIS / JOHNSTON / RAWLING

The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force Volume III

TORONTO

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Brereton Greenhous, Stephen J. Harris, William C. Johnston, and William G.P. Rawling

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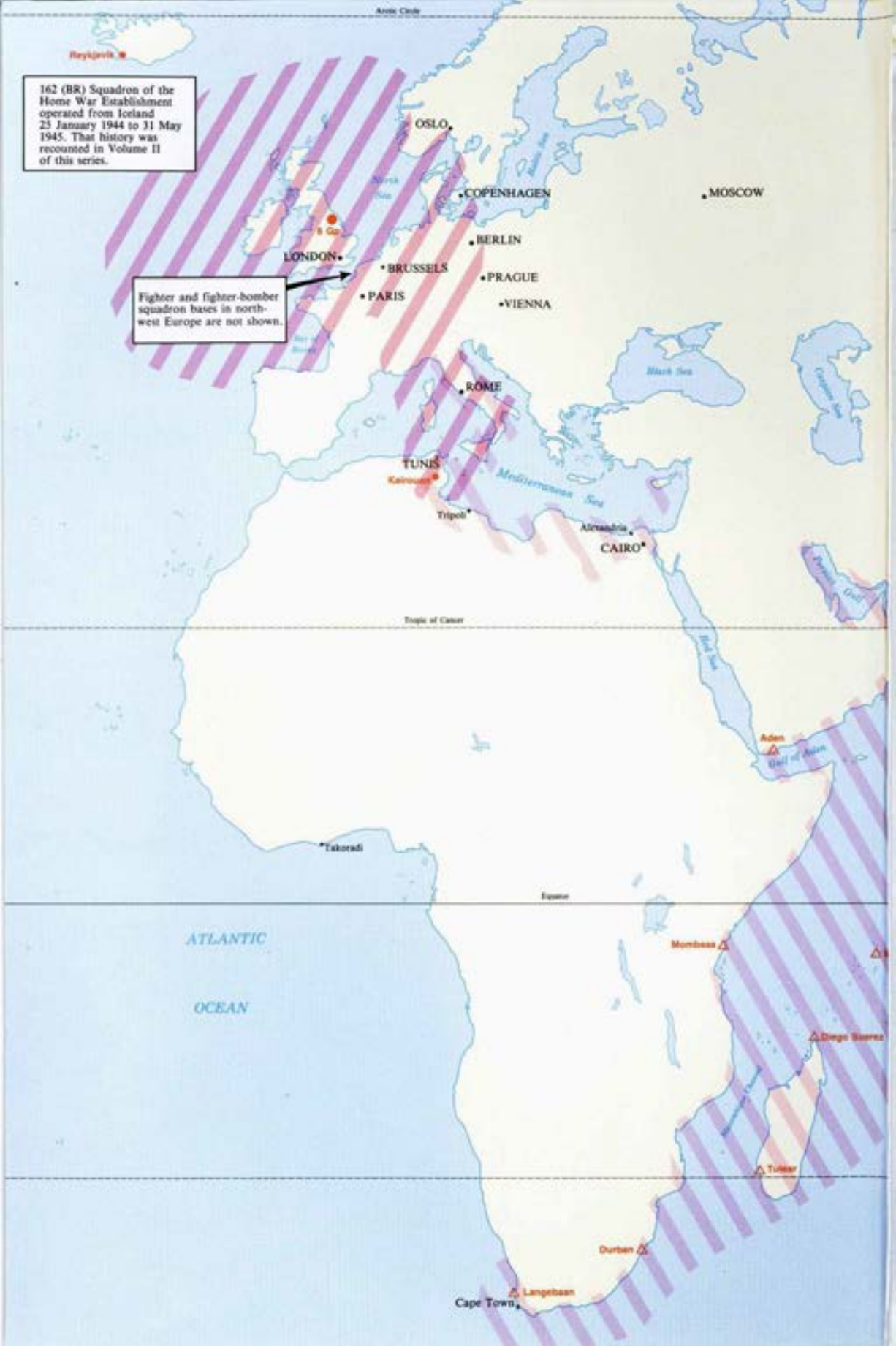
Some 40 per cent of RCAF aircrew who served overseas during the Second World War did so in RCAF squadrons. This is their story. The first squadron to see action was No 1 Fighter Squadron, later to be No 401, which after 18 August 1940 participated in the Battle of Britain. The last squadrons in service were Nos 435 and 436, delivering supplies in Burma until late August 1945. In the intervening years, RCAF squadrons served in all the major commands and in most major theatres of war. They were engaged by day and by night in air-to-air combat, strategic bombing, photo-reconnaissance, anti-shipping strikes and anti-submarine patrols, close air support, interdiction, and tactical airlift supply.

The Crucible of War is divided into five parts: Air Policy, the Fighter War, the Maritime Air War, the Bomber Air War, and the Air Transport War. The authors break new ground by demonstrating the influence of senior RCAF officers in shaping the execution of Canadian air policy, and they show how senior RCAF officers were permitted to determine the pace of Canadianization of the RCAF.

Many operations are described in detail from a wide variety of documentary sources, among them the unsuccessful battle of attrition that resulted from Fighter Command's offensive over France in 1941–2, and the actions of the RCAF's No 83 Group in Second Tactical Air Force, which provided air support for the British Second Army. Overdue notice is accorded the anti-shipping strike squadrons of Coastal Command. No 6 Group's battle with German night-fighters is recounted within the framework of complex electronic measures and counter-measures developed by both sides.

The RCAF, with a total strength of 4061 officers and men on 1 September 1939, grew by the end of the war to a strength of more than 263,000 men and women. This important and well-illustrated


Arctic Circle
Reykjavik
162 (BR) Squadron of the Home War Establishment operated from Iceland 25 January 1944 to 31 May 1945. That history was recounted in Volume II of this series.
OSLO
COPENHAGEN
MOSCOW
BERLIN
LONDON
BRUSSELS
PRAGUE
PARIS
VIENNA
Fighter and fighter-bomber squadron bases in north-west Europe are not shown.
ROME
TUNIS
Kairouan
Tripoli
Alexandria
CAIRO
Black Sea
Mediterranean Sea
Tropic of Cancer
Aden
Takoradi
Equator
ATLANTIC
OCEAN
Mombasa
Diego Suarez
Tulear
Durban
Langebaan
Cape Town

THE CRUCIBLE OF WAR, 1939–1945

THE OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE VOLUME III

BRERETON GREENHOUS
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Maps and charts by
William R. Constable

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Note: In the writing of this volume the authors have been given full access to relevant official documents in possession of the Department of National Defence. The inferences drawn and opinions expressed are those of the authors, and the department is in no way responsible for their reading or presentation of the facts as stated.

Contents

Part IV: The Bomber War

Part V: Air Transport

Appendices

Maps, Figures, and Tables

Maps

Figures

Tables

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At the same time, the principal authors wish to make it clear that they, and they alone, are responsible for all errors and omissions, whether in the body of the book or in this list of acknowledgments.

Abbreviations, Acronyms, and Codenames

AASF	Advanced Air Striking Force
Abigail	bombing campaign against selected German towns (autumn 1940)
a/c	aircraft
AC	Army Co-operation (squadron)
ACAS	Assistant Chief of the Air Staff
A/C/M	Air Chief Marshal
ADGB	Air Defence of Great Britain
ADI (K)	Assistant Directorate of Intelligence (Department K)
AEAF	Allied Expeditionary Air Forces
AFC	Air Force Cross
AFDU	Air Fighting Development Unit
AFHQ	RCAF Headquarters, Ottawa
AFU	Air Fighting Unit
AGLT	Automatic Gun-Laying Turret
AI	airborne interception radar or Air Intelligence
ALO	Air Liaison Officer
A/M	Air Marshal
AMP	Air Member for Personnel
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
AO-in-C	Air Officer-in-Chief
AOC-in-C	Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief
AOP	Air Observation Post
APC	Armament Practice Camp
API	air position indicator
Argument	concentrated attack on German aircraft production (February 1944)
ASR	air-sea rescue
ASSU	Air Support Signals Unit
ASV	Air to Surface Vessel (radar)
A/V/M	Air Vice-Marshal
B-bomb	buoyant bomb
Barbarossa	German attack on Soviet Union (June 1941)

BCATP	British Commonwealth Air Training Plan
BdU	Befehlshaber der U-boote (U-boat Headquarters)
BDU	Bombing Development Unit
Benito	German night-fighter control system
Berlin	German AI radar
Bernhardine	data transmission system used for German night-fighter control
Big Ben	V-2 rocket
Bodenplatte	Luftwaffe attack on Allied airfields in Northwest Europe (1 January 1945)
Bombphoon	Hawker Typhoon modified for employment as a fighter-bomber
Boozer	warning device to bomber crews that Würzburg was in use
BR	Bomber Reconnaissance (squadron)
Briar	device to disrupt Egon
Bugle	Allied air attack against communications in the Ruhr (1944–5)
Bumerang	device which detected (and jammed) Oboe transmissions
Cab rank	Small formation of fighters/fighter-bombers available for immediate close tactical support
CAF	Canadian Air Force (1920–4)
Carpet	device to jam Würzburg GCI radar
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff
CBO	Combined Bomber Offensive (1943–5)
Chastise	air attack on German dams (May 1943)
Cigar/Airborne Cigar	jamming of German VHF fighter radio communications
Circus	fighter-escorted daylight bombing attacks on short-range targets aimed at bringing Luftwaffe to battle
Clarion	American operation to disrupt German communications and morale by widespread bombing and fighter attacks (February 1945)
CMU	Care and Maintenance Unit
CO	commanding officer
Cobra	American breakout near St Lo, France (July 1944)
Cork	Coastal Command anti-U-boat patrols (1944)
Corona	counterfeit orders transmitted by radio to German night-fighters
Crossbow	attack on V-weapon launching sites
DAF	Desert Air Force
DAO-in-C	Deputy Air Officer-in-Chief
DAOC-in-C	Deputy Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief

Dartboard	jamming measure against German fighter communications
DAS	Director of Air Staff
DBOps	Director of Bomber Operations
DCAS	Deputy Chief of the Air Staff
DDBOps	Deputy Director of Bomber Operations
Deadly	anti-E-boat patrol area off Belgian and Dutch coasts
Derange	anti-U-boat patrol area in Bay of Biscay
DFC	Distinguished Flying Cross
DFM	Distinguished Flying Medal
DGO	Director General Organization
DGP	Director General Personnel
Diver (and anti-Diver)	attacks by (and defensive patrols against) V-1
Donnerkell	device to detect Oboe-equipped aircraft
Dracula	plan to capture Rangoon by airborne and amphibious assault (1945)
Drumstick	jamming of German W/T fighter control channels
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
Dudelsack	device that jammed British R/T and W/T
Dunkelnachtjagd	early night air defence system without searchlight assistance
Düppel	German Window
DZ	dropping zone
e/a	enemy aircraft
EATS	Empire Air Training Scheme
Eclipse	plan of action to be taken in event of early German surrender
Egon	radio navigation aid for German night-fighter force
Elefant	early warning radar
Enigma	German encoding machine
Epsom	Second British Army crossing of the Odon and Orne rivers (June–July 1944)
ETA	estimated time of arrival
Exodus	evacuation to UK by air of former Allied prisoners of war
F/(F)	fighter
FAA	Fleet Air Arm (Royal Navy)
FCP	Forward Control Post
FEM/AG	flight engineer mechanic (air gunner)
Fidget	jamming measures against German night-fighter control channels
FIDO	Fog Investigation Dispersal Organization: system for clearing fog from runways

Fishpond	radar device warning of presence of other aircraft
F/L	Flight Lieutenant
Flak	Flugabwehrkanon: anti-aircraft artillery
Flamme	device that homed on IFF and Mandrel transmissions
Flensburg	device allowing night-fighters to detect, and home on, Monica, Mandrel, and Piperack
Flower	offensive patrols over German night-fighter airfields
F/O	Flying Officer
Fortitude	cover and deception plan for Overlord
FR	fighter reconnaissance
Freya	early warning radar
Freya-Halbe	countermeasure used against Mandrel
F/Sgt	Flight Sergeant
Fuller	plan implemented in February 1942 to attack major German fleet units in the English Channel
G-H	radar blind-bombing device
GAF	German Air Force
Gardening	aerial minelaying
G/C	Group Captain
GCI	Ground Controlled Interception
Gee	radio aid to navigation
Gerhard	device that detected Monica transmissions
Geschwader	Luftwaffe formation, generally of three Gruppen
GHQ	General Headquarters
Gilbey	anti-shipping patrols off Dutch coast
Gisela	German attack on Bomber Command airfields (March 1945)
GOC	General Officer Commanding
Gomorrah	concentrated incendiary attacks on Hamburg (July–August 1943)
Goodwood	Second British Army attack southeast of Caen (July 1944)
GP	general purpose (bomb)
GPI	ground position indicator
GR	General Reconnaissance (squadron)
Grocer/Airborne Grocer	device to jam German AI radar
Gruppe	Luftwaffe formation, generally of three Staffeln
GSU	Group Support Unit
H2S	radar aid to navigation and target identification
H2X	American version of H2S
HC	high capacity (bomb)
HCU	Heavy Conversion Unit
HE	high explosive

Heinrich	device that jammed Gee transmissions
Helle Nachtjagd	air defence system that depended on searchlights
HF	high frequency
Himmelbett	air defence system based on strict radar ground control
Hoden	anti-E-boat patrols
Horchdienst	German signals intelligence service
Hurricane	plans for concentrated air attacks on Ruhr (spring 1945)
Husky	Allied invasion of Sicily (July 1943)
HWE	Home War Establishment (RCAF)
Hydra	German naval cypher
Hydra	Bomber Command attack on Peenemünde (August 1943)
IE	initial equipment
IFF	Identification Friend or Foe: electronic means of identifying aircraft at a distance
Intruder	RAF/RCAF night-fighter employed to disrupt enemy's communications and use of airfields
Jadgschloss	early warning radar
JATP	Joint Air Training Plan
Jim Crow	fighter anti-shipping reconnaissance
Jostle	measures to jam German R/T fighter transmissions
Jubilee	amphibious assault on Dieppe (19 August 1942)
Kiel	infra-red detection device
Korfu	radar homing device used against H2S
LAC	Leading Aircraftsman
Lagoon	long-range anti-shipping reconnaissance
Laubfrosch	device to detect H2S transmissions
Laus	anti-jamming device used to limit Window's effects on Freya and Würzburg radars
Lichtenstein	airborne interception radar
L/L	Leigh Light
LMF	lack of moral fibre
LZ	landing zone
Mammut	early warning radar
Mandrel	electronic jamming of German early warning radars
Manna	air operation to feed Dutch (April–May 1945)
MAP	Ministry of Aircraft Production
Market Garden	Allied operation to establish a bridgehead across the lower Rhine (September 1944)
MB	'long' Window to jam German SN2 radar
Metox	device to warn U-boats of approaching aircraft using radar
MEW	Ministry of Economic Warfare
Millennium	'thousand-bomber' raid on Cologne (May 1942)

Monica	radar device to warn bomber crews of the approach of enemy fighters
Moorings	anti-U-boat patrol area off Iceland
MT	motor transport
MTB	motor torpedo boat
Musketry	anti-U-boat patrol area in the Bay of Biscay
MV	merchant vessel
Naxburg	ground-based radar to track H2S transmissions
Naxos	airborne variant of Naxburg
NCO/nco	non-commissioned officer
Neptun	AI radar
(Musical) Newhaven	(Oboe-assisted) method of blind H2S ground-marking followed, if possible, by visual identification
NJG	(Nachtjagdgeschwader) Luftwaffe night-fighter formation
Noball	V-1 launch site and storage facilities
Nomad	anti-shipping patrol
NPAAF	Non-Permament Active Air Force (RCAF)
OBE	Order of the British Empire
Oboe	radar blind-bombing device
OC	officer commanding
OKL	Oberkommando der Luftwaffe: Luftwaffe headquarters
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht: Armed Forces headquarters
ORB	Operations Record Book
Orgelpfeife	German countermeasure enabling a single night-fighter to simulate a larger force
ORS	Operational Research Section
OSHQ	RCAF Overseas Headquarters, London
OTS	Operational Training Squadron
OTU	Operational Training Unit
Overlord	Allied invasion of France (June 1944)
(Musical) Paramatta	(Oboe-assisted) blind ground-marking
Percussion	anti-U-boat patrol area in the Bay of Biscay
Perfectos	British device that triggered German IFF
PFF	Pathfinder Force (No 8 Group, Bomber Command) specially trained for target-finding and -marking
Pickwick	daylight bombing method
Piperack	jamming device used against German AI radar
Plunder	21 Army Group crossing of the Rhine (March 1945)
P/O	Pilot Officer
Pointblank	directive establishing priorities for the Allied Combined Bomber Offensive (June 1943)

Popular	photo-reconnissance mission
Postklystron	device to jam H2S
PRC	Personnel Reception Centre
PRU	Photographic Reconnaissance Unit
Pruning	large-scale Gardening operation (March 1943)
PSP	perforated steel planking
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAF	Royal Air Force
Ramrod	Fighter Command effort to bring Luftwaffe to battle by selective bombing of ground targets with a few heavily escorted bombers
Ranger	daylight incursion to disrupt enemy's use of airfields
RDF	radio direction-finding (first British term for what became generally known as radar)
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
Rhubarb	freelance fighter sortie over France and the Low Countries
RN	Royal Navy
RNZAF	Royal New Zealand Air Force
Rodeo	offensive fighter sweeps (without bombers) over enemy territory
Rooster	Coastal Command tactical control system employing ASV and airborne homing beacons
Rosendaal	device allowing night-fighters to home on Monica
Rover	armed reconnaissance sortie or forward ground control for same; in Coastal Command, an anti-shipping patrol
RP/rp	rocket projectile
R/T	radio telephone
Sägebock	device to detect Allied IFF
SAP	semi-armour-piercing
SASO	Senior Air Staff officer
Scarecrow	alleged (but non-existent) German pyrotechnic device simulating the destruction of a bomber in the air
Schräge Musik	slanted or jazz music: upward-firing cannon mounted in German night-fighters
SEAC	Southeast Asia Command
Seaslug	anti-submarine patrol area in the Bay of Biscay
Seelöwe	plan for the invasion of Great Britain in 1940 (Sealion)
Serrate	device enabling British night-fighters to home on radar transmissions of enemy aircraft
SFTS	Service Flying Training School
Sgt	Sergeant

SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force
Shaker	1942 target-identification technique employing incendiary bombs dropped by Gee-equipped aircraft
Shiver	jamming device used against Würzburg GCI radars
S/L and S/Ldr	Squadron Leader
Sledgehammer	plan for limited invasion of France (1942)
SN2	German AI radar
Spanner	infra-red detection device
Sprat	Bomber Command attack on Dortmund (6/7 October 1944)
Spring	II Canadian Corps attack on Verrières Ridge (July 1944)
SS	Schutzstaffel: Nazi paramilitary and security force
Staffel	Luftwaffe formation, generally of nine aircraft
Starkey	deception operation simulating invasion of France (1943)
Steinflug	proposed intruder operation against Bomber Command airfields (winter 1943–4)
Steinbock	air attacks on London (1940)
TAF	Tactical Air Force
Thunderclap	proposal for massive air attack on Berlin (August 1944, spring 1945)
TI	target indicator
Tiger Force	RAF/RCAF contribution to air war against Japan
Timothy	strafing sortie under Rover control
Tinsel	jamming of German R/T fighter communications and control channels
Torch	Allied invasion of northwest Africa (November 1942)
Totalize	First Canadian Army attack towards Falaise (August 1944)
Tractable	First Canadian Army attack to close Falaise gap (August 1944)
TRE	Telecommunications Research Establishment
Triton	German naval cypher
UHF	ultra high frequency
Uhu	data transmission device used in German night-fighter control system
Ultra	signals intelligence derived from penetration of German Enigma cyphers
UP	unrotated projectile (rocket)
USAAF	United States Army Air Forces
USAFE	United States Air Forces in Europe
USSBS	United States Strategic Bombing Survey
USSTAF	United States Strategic Air Forces

V-1	unmanned German 'flying bomb'
V-2	long-range German rocket
Varsity	airborne operation to establish bridgehead on east bank of the Rhine (March 1945)
VC	Victoria Cross
VCAS	Vice Chief of the Air Staff
VCP	Visual Control Post
Vegetable	sea mine dropped by aircraft
Veritable	First Canadian Army attack on the Rhineland (February–March 1945)
VHF	very high frequency
Village Inn	see AGLT
VLR	very long range (as applied to aircraft)
Wacht am Rhein	German Ardennes offensive (December 1944)
(Musical) Wanganui	(Oboe-assisted) sky-marking with coloured flares and markers
Wassermann	early warning radar
W/C	Wing Commander
Weeding	large-scale Gardening operation (March 1943)
Wilde Sau	freelance night-fighter (Wild Boar)
Window (Chaff)	strips of metallic foil dropped from aircraft to confuse German radar
W/O	Warrant Officer
WOAG	wireless operator (air gunner)
WOM/AG	wireless operator mechanic (air gunner)
W/T	wireless telegraphy
Würzburg	ground-controlled interception radar
Ypsilon	radio navigation aid
Zahme Sau	ground-controlled pursuit night-fighter (Tame Boar)

General Introduction

This is the third of a projected four-volume series outlining the history of the Royal Canadian Air Force, which was promulgated (by administrative fiat) on 1 April 1924 and absorbed into the tri-service Canadian Armed Forces (via the Canadian Forces Reorganization Act) on 1 February 1968.

The first volume in the series, S.F. Wise's *Canadian Airmen and the First World War* (1980), essentially concerned itself with the aviation backgrounds of Canadians who participated in the creation of military airpower while serving in the British flying services. Their wartime experiences provided the foundation on which the ethos and character of the RCAF was built and provided the next generation of airmen with an 'instant tradition.'

The second volume, W.A.B. Douglas's *Creation of a National Air Force* (1986), recounted the vicissitudes of the new service until the outbreak of the Second World War and dealt with that part of its history during the Second World War which occurred in the Western Hemisphere – the operations of the Home War Establishment, including the Aleutian campaign and the Battle of the Atlantic, and the creation and concerns of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan that made Canada, in President Franklin Roosevelt's words, 'the airdrome of democracy.'

This volume traces the activities of the RCAF Overseas – those parts of the service which were based (at various times and in widely differing quantities) in Northwest Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Far Eastern theatres of war. In one major respect it differs from the earlier volumes, and (almost certainly) from the volume yet to come, which will follow the fortunes of the post-Second World War RCAF. For reasons explained in Part One, Air Policy, a substantial majority of the 93,844 RCAF personnel who served overseas between 1940 and 1945 did not serve in Canadian squadrons: and probably every one of the five hundred-odd squadrons (and a large proportion of the innumerable ancilliary units) that fell under the worldwide operational control of the Royal Air Force included RCAF men at one time or another. Their stories will not be found here.

To write them would be to write the entire history of the air war, a multi-volume task quite beyond the financial and human resources of this directorate. Rather, our mandate was to prepare an institutional history of the RCAF; that

has meant ignoring the vast contribution of all those Canadians who served outside its organizational structure except in those rare cases where the circumstances of an individual impinged directly upon it.

Non-flying personnel have also been lightly treated in these pages, except, perhaps, in regard to the creation and implementation of policy. The *raison d'être* of an air force – any air force – is to fight, and it is, by and large, the fighters who determine its nature, provide the measure of its success, and set its future course. Moreover, non-fighting activities – maintenance, administration, training, radar monitoring, flying control, flying support, for example, – although vital to success, tended to be routine and repetitive, and are therefore relatively poorly recorded. Within the limitations imposed on us by length we feel we have done what we can to pay tribute to the part that non-flying personnel played in the ultimate successes of the RCAF.

One notable exception to that rule of thumb is to be found in the later stages of the Northwest Europe campaign when airfields of the Second Tactical Air Force were not only subject to sporadic attacks by enemy fighter-bombers, which led to a number of battle casualties among groundcrews and administrative personnel, but also faced the occasional threat of German counter-attacks on the ground. We should like to take this opportunity to record that, overall, 337 non-flying personnel lost their lives in the line of duty, sixty-two of them directly to enemy action.

We have mentioned the role of women in the context of Overseas Headquarters and No 6 (RCAF) Group headquarters, but gone little further because, in our opinion, though their contributions as individuals were as great as those of men doing identical or similar work, their numbers were relatively small and their overall impact on the service not great. Similar constraints apply to visible minorities, although students of social history will be aware that there is a credible and growing body of scholarship that specializes in the history of these groups in the wartime services.

To all those who, on reading this work, feel themselves, their relatives, or their friends slighted we offer our apologies and the poor excuse that perfection is harder to achieve in history than in most disciplines.

As with the earlier volumes, this book is divided into parts, dealing in turn with Air Policy, the Fighter War, the Maritime Air War, the Bomber Air War, and the Air Transport War. Each part opens with a brief introductory summary of its contents and is written to stand alone, so that those readers whose interest is restricted to one functional aspect of Canada's air war may happily limit themselves to reading this general introduction, the key Air Policy section (which we believe will prove unusually interesting and instructive to Canadians), that other section which particularly concerns them, and the introductions to the remaining sections.

However, we like to think that most readers will eventually find the story sufficiently absorbing to cover it all. *Per Ardua ad Astra* – Through Adversity to the Stars – is as true of reading history as it is of learning to fly.

PART ONE

Air Policy

Prime Minister Mackenzie King (centre) and the RCAF's chief of the air staff, Air Vice-Marshal G.M. Croil (right centre), bid farewell to No 110 Squadron, prior to that unit's departure for the United Kingdom on 31 January 1940. (HC 9284)

Another shipload of BCATP graduates arrive in the United Kingdom, where the majority of Canadian aircrew were posted to RAF rather than RCAF units. (PL 4881)

Air Commodore G.V. Walsh, air officer commanding, RCAF in Great Britain, 7 March to 15 October 1940. (PL 2344)

Air Commodore L.F. Stevenson, who replaced Walsh as air officer commanding, RCAF in Great Britain, believed that Canadian airmen could best serve the war effort as members of RAF units and formations. (PL 4311)

Group Captain A.P. Campbell, the senior air staff officer at Overseas Headquarters during 1940–1, who could not accept the RCAF's Canadianization policies and was therefore posted back to Canada, chats with the Duke of Windsor. (PMR 24-244)

Minister of National Defence for Air C.G. Power, whose concerns were always more political than aeronautical, enjoys a conversation with his Air Ministry hosts during his July 1941 visit to the United Kingdom while the Canadian AOC, Air Commodore Leigh Stevenson, looks on. (PL 4406)

Prime Minister Mackenzie King meets the pilots of a newly formed Canadian fighter squadron, No 412, in August 1941. (PL 4585)

'Chubby' Power with British prime minister Winston Churchill during his 1941 visit to the United Kingdom. On the left is Canadian high commissioner Vincent Massey. (PL 4395)

Air Marshal Harold Edwards, air officer commanding-in-chief, RCAF Overseas, 24 November 1941 to 31 December 1943, spent two difficult years attempting to reassert a measure of national control over Canada's overseas airmen. (PL 10133)

Aircrew assemble at No 3 Personnel Reception Centre in Bournemouth, England, prior to an inspection by King George VI. Posting of Canadian personnel throughout the training chain, from Bournemouth to operational squadrons, was controlled by the RAF for most of the war. (PL 4753)

Sir Charles Portal visits the Canadian pilots of No 417 Squadron in Italy, December 1943. Squadron Leader A.U. Houle stands facing the camera. (PMR 77-524)

The RCAF's portly chief of the air staff, Air Marshal Lloyd Breadner, shakes hands with the air member for training, Air Vice-Marshal Robert Leckie. The British-born Leckie had originally been loaned to Canada by the RAF to help run the BCATP. He transferred to the RCAF in April 1942 and was selected to replace Breadner as CAS when the latter left Ottawa in December 1943 to become AOC-in-C, RCAF Overseas. (PL 21717)

Avro Lancaster Xs of 428 Squadron prepare to depart Middleton St George on 31 May 1945 for the return flight to Canada, where they were scheduled to become a part of Tiger Force. (PL 44319)

Squadron and station personnel watch a Lancaster X of 420 Squadron take off from Tholthorpe in June 1945 on its return flight to Canada to join Tiger Force. (PL 44840)

Introduction

In late August 1939 the RCAF comprised twenty squadrons, eight regular and twelve auxiliary (or reserve), of which all were understrength and all but one equipped with aging aircraft that in no way could be considered first-line machines. Even so, the air staff was in the process of drawing up ambitious contingency plans aimed at producing twenty-four squadrons for service overseas within about two years of the outbreak of war. (Army cooperation squadrons would be the first to proceed abroad, to support Canadian formations in the field.) The twenty-four squadrons of this expeditionary air force were in addition to whatever units would have to remain at home for local defence – seventeen according to the August calculations – and such expansion would clearly require the creation of a large domestic air training scheme.

These plans were drafted before the government had decided its war policy, but by and large they reflected what was known or assumed about its preferences in organizing the country's military effort for another world war. Legislation passed in the 1930s (the Visiting Forces Act) laid down and reinforced the principle that, wherever and whenever possible, Canadians should serve in distinctly Canadian units and formations under Canadian commanders. At the same time, it seemed likely that the government would give priority to the RCAF in the belief that the casualty rate in the air war would be much less than that on the ground.

Events soon overtook these plans. When the British government made known the emphasis that it, too, intended to place upon air power, and the difficulties it anticipated in bringing the Royal Air Force up to its desired strength, the Canadian government agreed to participate in, and help finance, a mammoth, Commonwealth-wide, air training scheme that would see the majority of graduates initially placed at the disposal of the Air Ministry, for service with the RAF, irrespective of their nationality. But not all; and not forever. Although the language of the December 1939 British Commonwealth Air Training Plan agreement was imprecise, Ottawa believed that it had arranged for all Canadian graduates of the BCATP to serve eventually in RCAF squadrons overseas. London, however, preferred to think that only some of them would be posted to a limited number of Canadian squadrons – which might be either RCAF or 'Canadian RAF' and which need not be fully manned by Canadians.

The crisis caused by the successful German Blitzkrieg on France and the subsequent Battle of Britain delayed further discussion of this issue until the winter of 1940–1, when the Ralston-Sinclair Agreement established that twenty-five RCAF squadrons would be formed overseas. That would still leave thousands of Canadian airmen to serve in RAF and other Commonwealth units, but so long as these twenty-five squadrons were formed quickly – and Canadianized quickly – Ottawa seemed content with the degree of recognition Canada's contribution to the air war would receive. By September 1941, however, some 4500 Canadian aircrew had proceeded overseas, but fewer than 500 were serving in RCAF squadrons. The rest were scattered throughout the RAF, often beyond the reach of Canadian authorities enquiring after their welfare, a development which caused the government in Ottawa not inconsiderable embarrassment. The national air force created in the 1930s had taken on a decidedly neo-colonial flavour.

Much of the political and administrative history of the RCAF during the Second World War consequently involved finding ways and means of working out the language of the 1939 air training agreement to meet Canadian demands to form RCAF squadrons overseas as quickly as possible and to fill them with Canadians – a process that came to be called 'Canadianization.' Ottawa also endeavoured to ensure that Canadian airmen, wherever they might serve, would be governed by RCAF policies and regulations regarding pay, promotion, commissioning, and repatriation, all of which were more generous than the corresponding RAF policies. As the number of RCAF squadrons overseas grew, it was also important that they be organized into higher formations – a Canadian bomber group and, since a Canadian fighter group proved impossible, Canadian fighter wings.

For a myriad of reasons, some more justifiable than others but none entirely compelling, progress on all these fronts was very slow – indeed, painfully so. When not being prodded, the Air Ministry and the RAF's operational commands rarely bothered to post Canadian aircrew to RCAF squadrons on a priority basis, or to see to it that Canadian personnel policies were adhered to. At times, their lack of compliance seemed nothing less than obstruction. But it must also be said that Canada's prodding and complaining about the slow pace was neither continuous nor consistent, and this lack of consistency made life difficult for Air Marshal H. Edwards, the one RCAF Overseas Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief to have taken up the Canadianization question with vigour.

Looking ahead, however, and following a second major air training conference in 1942 and further negotiations in February 1944, Canada was eventually able to organize thirty-eight RCAF squadrons overseas – including the fourteen of No 6 (RCAF) Bomber Group – while transferring a further nine directly from the Home War Establishment.* While that total went far beyond the air staff's August 1939 plan, it should be pointed out that on a squadron basis the RCAF's

* This total does not include Eastern Air Command's No 162 Squadron, which was loaned to Coastal Command from January 1944.

contribution to the air war grossly underrepresented its commitment in air and groundcrew. In the summer of 1944, as the overseas service neared its peak wartime strength, there were 10,200 aircrew and 25,300 groundcrew overseas in RCAF squadrons, headquarters, training units, and personnel depots, and an additional 16,000 aircrew and 6500 groundcrew in comparable RAF billets. In terms of aircrew alone, the RCAF contributed about 19 per cent of the total aircrew establishment of the five hundred squadrons at the disposal of Sir Charles Portal worldwide, while claiming only just under 9 per cent of the squadrons. Moreover, even then, the overall Canadianization rate in RCAF squadrons was less than 80 per cent.

The sense of disappointment with the RCAF's institutional experience in the war against Germany fundamentally influenced the plans made for its contribution to the war against Japan. Although these plans never had to be fully implemented after the Americans used the atomic bomb against Hiroshima and Nagasaki, senior politicians and airmen alike had decided that the RCAF must stand on its own as the embryonic national air force it had been before war broke out.

1
The Re-creation of a Colonial Air Force, September 1939–May 1941

As readers of volume II of this series will know, the Royal Canadian Air Force became an essentially military service only in 1938, having spent much of the previous fourteen years engaged in such activities as forest patrolling, aerial photography, and police liaison in the service of other government departments. The prewar RCAF was very small. Its total strength on 31 August 1939 was 4061, all ranks, of whom 3048 were regulars. There were 298 Permanent Force officers (235 of them pilots), of whom one-fifth had been appointed since the turn of the year. Well educated for the time, practically all of those commissioned since 1924 had graduated (usually in engineering or applied science) from a civilian university or the Royal Military College of Canada. So small was the officer corps, and so slow the rate of promotion, however, that at the outbreak of war the most senior of those who had joined since 1 April 1924, C.R. Slemon, was still only a squadron leader, serving as senior staff officer at Western Air Command headquarters.[1]

Policy and direction, therefore, were in the hands of veterans of the First World War who had joined the fledgling Canadian Air Force between 1919 and 1923, when the only criterion for selection was a solid record (or better) as a wartime flyer. While most of them had finished high school, only four had university degrees, and they all filled technical appointments. Four officers – J.L. Gordon, G.M. Croil, L.S. Breadner, and G.O. Johnson – had attended the Imperial Defence College in London, while another twenty had been to the Royal Air Force Staff College at Andover. Although they had surely benefited from these courses, what they had been taught – geopolitics and principles of imperial defence at IDC; the theory of air power at Andover, with heavy emphasis on strategic bombing – had little relevance to the problems they faced after 10 September 1939 in how to mobilize, organize, equip, and train squadrons for overseas service. Furthermore, two dozen trained staff officers and 235 pilots represented a miniscule talent pool from which to find good senior commanders, their staffs, or even squadron commanders for the twenty-three squadrons (and associated training establishments) which were to be mobilized at the outbreak of war – much less the additional eighteen it was hoped would be dispatched overseas within the next two years.[2]

Typical of the RCAF's older breed was Air Vice-Marshal G.M. Croil. After serving in the RFC and RAF during the First World War, he had joined the CAF as one of its charter members and earned a reputation as an honest and sincere 'straight-shooter' in a career which combined staff service at headquarters and seven years (1927–34) as the commanding officer at Camp Borden. Appointed senior air officer in 1934, when the air staff still reported to the army's chief of the general staff, he became the first chief of the air staff (CAS) when the RCAF became completely independent in 1938. It was under Croil's stewardship that the RCAF entered the war; and it was Croil who, in the beginning, worked hard to ensure that Canada's national air force was not left out of the fighting overseas.[3]

That task had begun in late August 1939, when the three service chiefs had outlined to defence minister Ian Mackenzie their thinking on what Canada should do in the early stages of a war that now seemed inevitable. Government policy since 1923 (but particularly since 1936) had required Canadian military planners to focus on home defence, and that was taken into account in Croil's submission: of the twenty-three RCAF squadrons to be mobilized immediately, seventeen would remain at home for direct defence or to safeguard 'trade routes adjacent to our territory.' In line with long-standing assumptions, however, the CAS recommended that an army cooperation wing of three squadrons (which could be equipped with Canadian-built Westland Lysanders and serve with a Canadian Expeditionary Force) should be provided 'from the outset,' adding that the RCAF could also dispatch the personnel for a bomber wing of three squadrons (but with no aircraft or equipment).[4]

Having proved acceptable to Mackenzie, these proposals were laid before the Cabinet's defence committee on 5 September. Knowing his audience, Croil carefully explained that 'expenditures and enlistments to date bore no relation' to the dispatch of an expeditionary force overseas, but he also observed that 'so far as the air was concerned, the only likelihood of any attack on Canada would be an odd bomb here or there for moral effect and to discourage Canada from sending her forces outside the country.' If, as he suspected, Canadians made 'an immediate and overwhelming demand for active intervention with armed forces in direct aid of Great Britain' once the decision to go to war had been taken, that contribution to be worthwhile would have to be made abroad. What he could not yet say, with any certainty, was how soon the six squadrons might proceed overseas, or where and when the bomber squadrons would be furnished with aircraft and conduct their operational training. Since they would probably be equipped with aircraft purchased in Britain, the United Kingdom was the likeliest venue.[5]

For the longer term, the air staff was also working on a scheme to form an additional eighteen squadrons – personnel, less all equipment – for dispatch overseas 'at the rate of six per month from the date of departure of the original six.' Although nothing indicated what type of aircraft they would use – bomber, fighter, or some other – the air staff calculated, in some arcane fashion quite incomprehensible to a mere historian, that twenty-four overseas squadrons would require 3000 aircrew (including 1200 pilots) and 8200 ground-

crew a year to keep them up to establishment. That would entail setting up a new training organization; and to that end, the CAS seemed prepared to delay the dispatch overseas of at least the bomber wing. 'From the point of view of efficiency,' he explained later, 'it would be much better to retain all personnel here for the proper conduct and expansion of the training scheme.'[6]

On 6 September, before this idea had been put forward, a telegram arrived from London announcing the British government's doubts about the RAF's ability to meet its own manpower requirements 'if, as seems likely, intensive air operations develop in Western Europe.' Asking Ottawa not to form and train complete units for dispatch to Europe, except for those which would support an expeditionary force, Whitehall suggested 'that the best way in which Canada could assist would be to concentrate first on the individual training of pilots, observers, and particularly air gunners and W/T operators' for service in RAF units; but 'when sufficient officers and personnel were available in England and France the aim would be to form a Royal Canadian Air Force contingent' by recalling them from their British squadrons. To begin with, it was hoped, Canada might train as many as 120 pilots a year, and through 'the rapid expansion of present training facilities using civilian aerodromes,' the goal was to increase that number to 2000. In addition, London asked for 'the immediate enlistment of skilled mechanics both for Canadian expansion and for Royal Air Force.'[7]

There were obvious differences between the Canadian and British proposals in terms of where and when, and under whose direction, RCAF squadrons would be formed. However, they were not necessarily irreconcilable, as it seemed that both would eventually produce RCAF squadrons abroad. The question was whether Ottawa was willing to see Canadian airmen spend some time in RAF squadrons until the RCAF was ready to form its own – and that both the air staff and the Cabinet were prepared to accept. To meet Britain's immediate requirements, they were also prepared to dispatch, within six weeks, 'a number of Canadian Officer pilots with considerable flying experience on civil types but untrained in service duties, plus a number of newly enlisted airmen of various trades.' Quoting the CAS verbatim, however, Prime Minister Mackenzie King reiterated: 'It is the desire of this Government that Canadian Air Force units be formed as soon as sufficient trained personnel are available overseas for this purpose, such squadrons to be manned by and maintained with Canadian personnel at the expense of the Canadian Government. Owing to the shortage of service equipment in Canada, Canadian squadrons overseas would require to be completely equipped by the United Kingdom authorities, at Canada's expense.'[8]

The chiefs of staff met with the government's senior ministers again on 15 September, by which time Croil had heard that the British were likely to ask for a four-fold increase in the number of pilots to be trained. Fearing that his political masters might react positively to such a request, the CAS explained what a mammoth undertaking that would be – he had estimated the cost of the smaller Canadian plan at over $100 million – and cautioned that the impact of adopting the British proposal 'immediately would be so staggering as to baffle

the best efforts of those responsible.' Better, he advised, to proceed with the air staff's original concept aimed at providing the manpower for twenty-four RCAF squadrons by the end of 1941; and once that had given evidence of success, to expand the training system 'to meet the United Kingdom's request in full.'[9]

Whatever the case, Croil now doubted whether, apart from the army cooperation wing, it was wise to send any RCAF personnel overseas on loan in the short term, their talents being of more immediate use at home in setting up the training scheme. With the RAF facing the possibility of 'extremely heavy ... wastage' and serious disruption to its own training facilities:

> ... we can best help ... by concentrating our entire efforts, after securing our home defence upon the production of the greatest number of trained personnel in all categories. Our own Royal Canadian Air Force, now at slightly over half the required strength, designed for and employed for home defence, will be able to contribute little to this problem. I recommend therefore that we should not consider the despatch of any personnel at present to the Royal Air Force, but rather that we should absorb all resources of trained airmen available in Canada with the object of securing as many instructors as possible ... as it is only by so doing that we can exert our fullest effort to the task of providing an adequate supply of trained personnel in the shortest possible time.[10]

Yet within the week, 'in accordance with verbal instructions' (probably from Norman Rogers, who had replaced Mackenzie as minister of national defence on 19 September 1939), Croil advised London that twenty-five RCAF pilots and eighty former civil pilots would soon be dispatched 'for service with the Royal Air Force on loan.'[11] Even though the pace of mobilization and the number of squadrons to be sent overseas were being cut back in order to concentrate on training, for which these pilots would have been useful, the government wished for political reasons to see Canadian airmen overseas in the very near future. 'The present policy of the Government,' the CAS explained to his colleagues on 25 September, 'is to retain an Air Force in Canada for home defence and to despatch overseas trained personnel (both officer and airmen) to serve with the Royal Air Force (on loan).'

> Later it is anticipated that it will be possible to organize the overseas personnel (supplemented by transfers from home establishments) into squadrons of the Royal Canadian Air Force.
>
> The peacetime policy for the organization of the RCAF was the ultimate development of 23 squadrons ... At the moment it is impossible to organize, train and bring a force of 23 squadrons and their necessary training, administrative and maintenance units to full War Establishment and at the same time be prepared to despatch drafts of personnel overseas to serve with the Royal Air Force (on loan).
>
> From a review of the situation it has been determined that the maximum number of squadrons that we can, at the moment, bring up to establishment and equip and maintain is 15 (12 for home defence and 3 for attachment to the C[anadian] A[ctive]

S[ervice] F[orce]), the completion of the remaining 8 to be held in abeyance for the time being. This reduction in the number of squadrons will make it possible to meet the desires of the Government to have the Royal Canadian Air Force represented overseas as soon as possible by drafts of personnel.[12]

The next day, however, the Air Ministry asked Ottawa not to send either military or civilian pilots, 'pending important new proposals from London for Canadian air contribution.' Arriving on the 27th, these proposals raised the total aircrew training requirement to a staggering 20,000 a year, with pupils coming from all over the Commonwealth. While elementary training 'would be established in each Dominion according to its capacity,' it was suggested that advanced training 'should be centred in Canada.' The Air Ministry, however, still 'contemplated that the first call on Dominion personnel who had received their training in schools under the scheme would be for such air force units of Dominions as the participating Dominion Governments might be prepared to provide and maintain.'[13]

At this stage, although Canada's initial overseas commitment had been halved from six to three squadrons (all of them dedicated to army cooperation duties), and even more resources would have to be devoted to training, nothing had happened on either side of the Atlantic to confound the air staff's plan for raising a major RCAF presence overseas within two years. If, indeed, the formation of twenty-four squadrons was taken for granted, it might explain why, in Ottawa's reply, the focus was on the myriad of technical and financial details which would so dominate the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS) and its Canadian component, the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP). Croil's confidence about the ultimate nature and status of Canada's contribution to the air war may also explain why, on 4 October, the day after defence minister Rogers complained that the dispatch of just three squadrons would not 'satisfy public sentiment,' the CAS was reluctant to form what would amount to a fourth RCAF squadron overseas from Canadians already in the RAF. The infrastructure that would entail, including 'a RCAF headquarters, a pool of officers and a pool of airmen to replace wastage' as well as 'a constant flow of … replacements,' would be too great a drain on efforts to develop the training system.[14]

Lord Riverdale, a prominent industrialist with extensive experience of business negotiations in Canada, arrived in Ottawa later in the month to begin conversations relating to the empire air training proposal. By then, the British apparently wanted an RAF-controlled scheme, paid for by Ottawa, that would enlist trainees directly into the RAF, much as the RFC/RAF had drawn upon Canadian manpower during the First World War, and there was no longer any mention of forming an RCAF contingent from Canadian graduates. Indeed, in Whitehall's eyes, RCAF units were unnecessary for the successful prosecution of the war. Irritated by the 'sort of railroading, taking-for-granted style which Riverdale adopted,' however, Mackenzie King left no doubt that he wanted Canadians to join the RCAF, not the RAF, forcing the British negotiators to concede, privately, that the training scheme would have to maintain a 'Canadian façade.'[15]

Nevertheless, as negotiations proceeded and the nature of British thinking became clearer, Croil saw the prospect of a distinct RCAF presence overseas receding into a very distant future – if, indeed, it remained an objective at all. On 23 November he sought to remind the government how important the matter was. 'It would be detrimental to Canadian prestige as a nation,' he told Rogers, 'to restrict its official air effort to Home Defence and Training.' The Training Scheme will prepare Canadians for combatant duties in the air but if Canada has no squadrons overseas, the work of the individuals will be merged in the RAF. We have every reason to expect that Canadians will do well in the air. If they can serve in Canadian squadrons they will bring credit to Canada as a nation, and build up traditions for the RCAF and their squadrons.' According to his calculations, 'the proposed RCAF effort in the Training Scheme is equivalent to the maintenance of at least 50 squadrons in the field,' and on those grounds alone it was not 'unreasonable to ask the RAF to co-operate in arranging and financing a token RCAF Overseas Force' of fifteen squadrons controlled by 'an Overseas Headquarters, RCAF, to operate under RAF Headquarters in the field.'[16]

Once the thorny question of financial responsibility had been laid to rest, Canada's negotiators turned their attention to the question of RCAF representation in active theatres of war – and they wanted much more than Croil's modest proposal for fifteen squadrons. Their view of Article XV of the proposed agreement (which dealt with the question of national identification and affiliation) was simple, open-ended, and, Mackenzie King insisted, 'a prerequisite to signature' by his government: 'Canadian personnel from the training plan will, on request from the Canadian government, be organized in Royal Canadian Air Force units and formations in the field.' King was asking for much more than either the Australians or New Zealanders, who seemed satisfied with vague language which would leave it to Whitehall to initiate discussion on recognizing their contributions either through the formation of dominion units 'or in some other way.'[17]

Though still audible in King's words, the faint echoes of Croil's original twenty-four squadron plan would soon fade away entirely. That plan, it will be recalled, had looked to the dispatch of RCAF units complete in both air- and groundcrew; but with the enormous task of training now ahead, it was assumed (by Canada) that Canadian groundcrew would stay at home to service BCATP machines while RAF technicians remained in England and France to service RCAF squadrons. That made good, plain sense, for a number of reasons, yet it was the lack of an RCAF groundcrew component on which London's resistance to the formation of Canadian squadrons overseas now began to be centred. 'More than 50% of the squadrons of the Royal Air Force would be called Dominion squadrons,' the British War Cabinet objected, 'because their pilots were of Dominion origin, although by far the greater part of their personnel [ie, groundcrew] would be from the United Kingdom.'[18] London also preferred that dominions pay for the upkeep of their own squadrons, but because of Canada's three-year $350 million undertaking to finance the BCATP, the British agreed to pick up the cost of maintaining fifteen RCAF squadrons overseas. For

those dominion aircrew surplus to their own establishments and flying with the RAF, it was also proposed that they should wear 'on their uniforms ... such distinguishing emblem as each Dominion may select.'[19]

In Ottawa, meanwhile, and entirely on their own, the Canadian CAS and Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, the senior RAF representative with the Riverdale mission, had arrived at a solution which, at the symbolic level, would have offered Canada even less than the British appeared willing to give. 'For a squadron to be called a Royal Canadian Air Force squadron,' they agreed, 'it must consist wholly or predominantly of Canadian personnel both air and ground.' With almost no Canadian groundcrew proceeding overseas, the number of such squadrons would necessarily be very limited, but 'in order to accelerate Canadian representation at the front' Brooke-Popham was willing to ask the Air Ministry 'to form as a temporary measure a limited number of squadrons composed of RCAF flying personnel and Royal Air Force mechanics. These squadrons to be known as Royal Air Force (Canadian) Squadrons, and will be transformed into RCAF squadrons as and when Canadian ground personnel becomes available.' As Croil had agreed in September, the Canadian aircrew would 'remain RCAF and be counted as loaned to the Royal Air Force.'[20*]

Ottawa flatly rejected the Croil/Brooke-Popham concept, insisting instead that 'the Canadian pupils, when passing out from the training scheme, will be incorporated in or organized as units and formations of the Royal Canadian Air Force,' with groundcrews furnished by the RAF substituting for their Canadian counterparts needed for the training scheme. On 16 December, therefore, Riverdale phoned his secretary of state for air, Sir Kingsley Wood, asking that Article XV be interpreted so that 'all Canadian trainees would go into RCAF units if the Canadian Government so requested'; but since this was precisely the case that King had made and London had rejected only a few days before, it should come as no surprise that Riverdale was instructed to 'stand fast.'[21]

Meanwhile, the Canadians were urging Riverdale to 'exercise his own authority' in settling the Article XV question, so that air training could proceed. Their pressure was effective. Riverdale yielded and, although 'the numbers [of squadrons] to be incorporated or organized at any time' remained to be worked out by the two governments, he accepted in principle 'that on the request of the Canadian Government ... the Canadian pupils, when passing out from the Training Scheme, would be incorporated in or organized as units and formations of the Royal Canadian Air Force in the field. The detailed methods by which this can be done would be arranged by an Inter-Governmental Committee for this purpose under Paragraph 15.' Once Ottawa dropped the word 'the' before 'Canadian pupils' (offering the British delegation hope that not all of

* O.D. Skelton, undersecretary of state for external affairs and King's chief adviser, was also becoming concerned about Canada's commitments if it was anticipated that all Canadian graduates of the BCATP were to serve in RCAF squadrons. The British government could not be expected to bear the entire cost, he argued, but if Ottawa had to 'pay the Piper' the bill might exceed $750 million a year.

them had to be posted to RCAF squadrons), the agreement was signed by Riverdale and King shortly after midnight on 17 December.[22]

There was no rejoicing in London. The chancellor of the Exchequer, for one, protested that 'he had not agreed that Canada could insist on unlimited units of the RCAF being provided at the expense of the United Kingdom tax payer,' while a surprised and angry Sir Kingsley Wood urged Riverdale to write a further letter to Mackenzie King asking that questions regarding 'the number, composition and organisation of the RCAF units to be eventually formed having regard to all the circumstances' be left to subsequent government-to-government discussion.[23]

Having just concluded a difficult round of talks in which Ottawa had made the organization of RCAF squadrons the *sine qua non,* Riverdale warned his masters that reopening the issue 'might even put the agreement itself in peril.' The British Cabinet had to rest content with his assurance that the outcome of any discussions would be 'satisfactory,' given 'the greatly improved atmosphere of the past few days.' It could also draw some consolation from the fact that the RAF remained responsible for the formation of RCAF squadrons overseas, for, as Wood told his colleagues, 'it should be noted that practical difficulties would in all probability prevent the formation of a larger number of units of the RCAF than we in fact contemplated.'[24]

With the BCATP agreement signed, Ottawa turned its attention to the many problems involved in setting up a vast training organization, and (as Riverdale may have foreseen) the eventual disposition of RCAF graduates does not appear to have been given much further thought either by the overworked staff at Air Force Headquarters (AFHQ) or the government. Such was not the case in London, however, where both the Air Ministry and the Treasury Office were determined to circumvent Riverdale's agreement to form Canadian aircrew into RCAF squadrons. After a brief delay 'to assess the requirements, as regards composition and organisation, of the enlarged Air Forces at which we are collectively aiming,' the officials planned to have their negotiating position 'definitely ready in two months' time.'[25]

Whitehall hoped that further discussions on Article XV could be held in London, where 'these questions can be more expeditiously and satisfactorily dealt with in immediate contact with the Departments of the Air Ministry, who alone have a central view and detailed knowledge of all the requirements.' The Air Ministry and the Dominions Office also banked on involving representatives from Australia and New Zealand, who had been far less demanding over the formation of dominion squadrons overseas. Indeed, they anticipated that being forced 'to explain in the presence of their somewhat incredulous Australian and New Zealand colleagues the vital political importance which Canada attaches to their men not being placed at the unfettered disposal of the United Kingdom Command ... would strain even the resources which Canadian Ministers possess.'

For once, the Canadians were a match for their crafty allies. Australia and New Zealand readily agreed to meet in London, but the Canadians would not be drawn, Croil observing that Canada was 'not interested in, nor should we

risk being influenced by, the actions of the Australian and New Zealand Governments.' Moreover, since the discussion would focus principally on the formation of Canadian squadrons, about which the opinion of the Canadian government was critical, Ottawa was as logical a site as London.[26]

Determined not to hold talks in Canada, and hoping that Ottawa's attitude might yet soften, the British government chose to delay taking up the issue while continuing to develop a more detailed position on Article XV. Their revised terms, limiting RCAF representation to those squadrons completely manned by both Canadian air- and groundcrew, were finally relayed to the British high commissioner in mid-April. Before he could sound out the government, however, the Germans had launched their Blitzkrieg in the west, and there were more pressing matters to worry about than the organization of the RCAF overseas.[27]

The widening war, and Canada's expanding commitments, had already produced a reorganization of the Cabinet which, in turn, quickly led to personnel changes at Air Force Headquarters. C.G. Power, former postmaster-general, had been appointed minister of national defence for air (and associate minister of national defence) on 23 May. Norman Rogers, killed in an air crash on 10 June 1940, had been replaced on 5 July by J.L. Ralston, who continued to be regarded as the senior defence minister even while having primary responsibility for the army.

A jovial, chain-smoking, hard-drinking Quebecker, Power did not believe he could work effectively with the earnest, somewhat puritanical Croil. 'To my civilian mind he was altogether too regimental. I got the impression, rightly or wrongly, that friendly, sympathetic co-operation with him would, owing to our fundamental differences of temperament, be difficult if not impossible. I wanted friendship and co-operation; he, I imagine, expected me to give little more than routine supervision, leaving to him the unquestioned authority over the members of the service, and possibly over the purely civilian functions of the department … I requested him to hand in his resignation as Chief of Staff, and to accept a position as Inspector General of the Royal Canadian Air Force.'[28]

As a replacement, the minister found a kindred spirit in Croil's deputy, Air Commodore L.S. Breadner. 'Big, bluff, hearty, and congenial,' Power later wrote, Breadner 'almost at once became a close friend as well as a valued associate. We worked together in closest companionship … and [I] could not wish for any happier time than the time I spent in toil and play with him.'

Personal charm was one of the new CAS's more notable characteristics. A native of Carleton Place, Ontario, Breadner had completed only three years of high school before joining the family's jewellery business in Ottawa. In 1915 he had enlisted in the Royal Naval Air Service and spent most of the First World War as a fighter pilot in France. After the war, as a skilful pilot, he found employment as a certificate examiner with the Canadian Air Board before joining the RCAF in 1922.[29] He rose rapidly within the air force's ranks, being selected to serve as acting director under Lindsay Gordon from 1928 to

1932. Gordon found him to possess 'a highly developed sense of humour and although not of a placid disposition, he is generally reasonable, good natured, tolerant and cheery.' His personal qualities were equally evident to the staff of the Imperial Defence College which Breadner attended in 1936, the commandant describing him as 'an officer with a cheerful and likeable disposition, and a sense of humour, who, in consequence, is very popular with the other students of all services.' His abilities, however, were considered to be 'of a practical sort' and he was seen as 'pre-eminently a man of action.'[30]

When Breadner assumed the post of chief of the air staff on 29 May 1940, only one of the three army cooperation squadrons originally intended for overseas had been dispatched, No 110 Squadron having arrived at Old Sarum, in Wiltshire, to support the 1st Canadian Division, on 26 February. In anticipation of its arrival, on 1 January the RCAF's Air Liaison Office (which had been operating in London since 1919 to keep Canadian air officials informed on the latest aviation developments in the United Kingdom) had been upgraded to the status of an RCAF headquarters. The first air officer commanding, RCAF, in Great Britain, Group Captain G.V. Walsh, had arrived on 3 March.

With only one squadron to administer, the new headquarters was, for the moment, primarily concerned with establishing its own organization and creating a Records Office to keep track of RCAF personnel overseas. However, its intended relationship to the Air Ministry, as set out by Canadian high commissioner Vincent Massey in a letter to the dominions secretary in April, was clearly 'not [one] of subordination.' 'Details will be taken up between the two,' he explained, 'but if questions of policy arise, the channels of communication will be through the High Commissioner for Canada to or from the Department of National Defence in Ottawa.'[31]

Massey's pronouncement was based on instructions he had received from Ottawa on the interpretation to be placed on the Visiting Forces Act of 1933, the statutory basis governing the application of military law when troops from one Commonwealth country were stationed in another. When Canada had become a legally sovereign country on the passing of the Statute of Westminster in 1931, Canada's armed forces 'became with relation to the Forces of the United Kingdom, to all intents and purposes, foreign Forces in the same sense as those of the United States or any other foreign Power.' In order to place the administration of military discipline on a legal basis (since British military law no longer applied to the forces of the dominions), corresponding Visiting Forces acts were passed by the United Kingdom and Canada in 1933. Under their terms, organized national forces 'serving together' (that is, co-located but not under unified command) were each responsible for their own discipline according to their own military law. Once these forces were placed 'in combination' (that is, under unified command, usually for operations), their own military law would continue to apply but the combined force commander had the authority to convene and confirm the findings and sentences of courts martial. Canadian servicemen attached to British forces, including RCAF personnel in RAF squadrons, were subject to the military law of the force to which they were attached – and vice versa, although it was eventually decided that

for serious offences the sentence of the guilty party would be referred to his own government for confirmation.[32]

The act did not specify the relationship that would normally exist during training, nor did it address questions of organization or the military chain of command. Ottawa had clear ideas on both matters and, as Massey explained to the dominions secretary, 'the control of the organization and administration of the Royal Canadian Air Force serving overseas will be exercised by the Minister of National Defence of Canada ... through the Chief of the Air Staff [of] (Canada).' RCAF squadrons 'serving together' with the RAF were to be commanded by Overseas Headquarters (although the British would provide training facilities and instructors), but once OSHQ placed them 'in combination' the RAF would exercise operational control and be responsible for training. And, since these discussions took place before the fall of France, at a time when it was still anticipated that the war would be fought on the Continent, Ottawa agreed that the RAF should take over responsibility for administration and discipline of RCAF squadrons after they had moved to Europe.[33]

Air Ministry officials tended not to differentiate between 'serving together' and 'acting in combination,' and were inclined to interpret the Visiting Forces Act as placing dominion units under RAF command immediately on their arrival at an RAF base; but 'in all these matters,' an Air Ministry minute explained, 'it is necessary to proceed with tact and discretion in view of Canadian sensibilities and susceptibilities.' The Canadians are afraid, we imagine, that, if we insist that the Visiting Forces Act gives our C[ommanding] O[fficer]s full powers of command, the RCAF HQ here would become insulated and relatively meaningless. At the same time we feel that their insistence on their "rights" is theoretical rather than practical in the sense that if our COs exercise their powers unobtrusively no complaints will be made.'[34]

To many Canadians, however, their country's sovereignty was more than a matter of mere theory. The senior soldier overseas from 1939 to 1943, General A.G.L. McNaughton (who, as chief of the general staff in the early 1930s, had been a key player in drafting the Visiting Forces acts), believed that maintaining control of its armed forces was, in fact, the 'acid test' of Canadian sovereignty; but that task, as Lester Pearson (secretary at Canada House in 1940) has pointed out, 'was not made easier ... by the feeling sometimes encountered on the highest political and military levels [in Whitehall] that Canadian formations overseas were really an integral part of the British imperial forces and, as such, subject to the direction and control of London. This was not at all the position of the Canadian government who were determined to keep control of their own overseas forces and maintain their separate Canadian identity.'[35]

The German attack on France and the Low Countries in May 1940 hastened the need to define Overseas Headquarters' role more precisely. Nine days after the Blitzkrieg began, the British government asked Canada to dispatch a second army cooperation squadron as well as a fighter unit to bolster Britain's air defences. Within the month Nos 112 and 1 Squadrons had arrived in the United Kingdom and for the moment (and in line with Massey's instructions in April) everyone agreed that, since the two units were based in England,

personnel administration, including such matters as courts martial, 'pay, promotions, posting, records, etc,' would 'still remain the responsibility of the RCAF' even after they had been placed 'in combination with' the RAF. All casualties to RCAF personnel were also to be reported directly to OSHQ.[36]

Overseas Headquarters, in short, was laying an effective base for its authority over Canadian squadrons overseas; but its effort was soon eroded and undermined by the actions of senior officers in Ottawa who, Power recalled, evinced a cavalier attitude to the niceties of constitutional processes.

> When I came into the department, I found that, in the view of the service personnel (particularly in the higher brackets), there was an idea that the minister was little more than a mouthpiece to express in Parliament the views and opinions of the members of Air Council. Indeed Air Council had assumed to itself powers of administration and direction far beyond that which I, as a parliamentarian, thought it should.
>
> One of my first tasks was to make it clear that the service members of Air Council ... had no authority to give directions, and must confine themselves to the duty of making recommendations to the minister. It took some time before they fully accepted this idea.[37]

In fact, Power did not rein in his advisers nearly as quickly as his memoirs suggest, so that during his first five months in office, for example, he was not even aware of the nature of the bargaining that had taken place during the 1939 negotiations and was totally in the dark as to the agreement that had been reached with Lord Riverdale in regard to Article XV. Indeed, Breadner attempted to exploit this situation at the end of August 1940 in order to gain the minister's support for a course of action that was diametrically opposed to the Cabinet's own plans for Canada's overseas air force. The status of OSHQ – and the relationship of RCAF units overseas to the Air Ministry – were directly involved.[38]

Following the collapse of France – an armistice with Germany was signed on 25 June – the British government asked Ottawa's permission to transfer four of its service flying training schools from the increasingly crowded and dangerous skies over Britain to the relative safety of North American air space. While the Cabinet had no objections to the transfer, it was not willing to see an RAF headquarters established in Canada, however, and required the schools to be placed under RCAF administrative control. Manufacturing an analogy, Breadner informed Air Commodore Walsh that it was, 'under [the] circumstances, not consistent for us to maintain RCAF Headquarters overseas,' and he therefore proposed reducing it once again to the status of a liaison office and 'handing over responsibility [for] war records, training and care of replacements personnel to RAF.'[39]

Although the recommendation to close down OSHQ did not reflect his government's current policy, Breadner may have been thinking about administrative economies. Since the overseas air force would have to come under RAF operational control in any case, an argument could be made (as it was at the Air

Ministry) that a Canadian administrative headquarters was superfluous. At Overseas Headquarters, however, Breadner's telegram caused considerable consternation. In the absence of Air Commodore Walsh (confined to hospital since 9 August with a bad heart and suffering from chronic fatigue), a response was prepared by his senior air staff officer, Wing Commander A.P. Campbell, in consultation with officials in the High Commissioner's office. Together, they raised a number of questions about maintaining the Canadian identity of RCAF squadrons and the welfare of their men which should have been obvious to the air staff in Ottawa but, given its preoccupation with the BCATP, apparently were not.[40]

Breadner quickly reversed himself, telling Campbell to cancel his instructions of 31 August because 'other considerations render untenable the proposal we suggested.'[41] However, that was not the end of his meddling. In late September, when the fragile nature of Walsh's health compelled him to leave London, his successor, Air Commodore L.F. Stevenson, was told by Breadner and Power, in a pre-departure briefing, that apart from the three Canadian squadrons already committed, it had been decided 'as a matter of national policy to integrate all RCAF personnel into the Royal Air Force' and that Overseas Headquarters would function as a liaison office.[42]

In fact, this so-called national policy was entirely the creation of AFHQ, there having been no reference to, or approval from, the Cabinet, and approval was not sought until two weeks later when the unwitting Power finally submitted the air staff's views to the Cabinet War Committee, explaining that they 'had been going on the assumption that Canadian pilots and air crews would be incorporated into the RAF, and that RCAF squadrons, overseas, would be limited probably to the three squadrons now in the United Kingdom. This question related directly to a recommendation of the Air Staff that the RCAF headquarters in the United Kingdom be abolished and a simple liaison office be substituted. This was proposed by the Air Staff on the understanding that Canadians from the Plan would be absorbed into the RAF, and that administration, Command and promotions would be matters solely for the RAF.'[43]

Having negotiated hard the previous autumn in trying to ensure that Canadian airmen would be assigned to Canadian squadrons, the prime minister was stunned to discover the extent to which Power did not know the government's policy; and, in what could only have been an embarrassing moment, Mackenzie King forcefully outlined his position, paying particular attention to the fact 'that the question of identification of Canadians graduating from the Plan had been regarded as of the highest importance from the Canadian point of view.' Not only had the issue been 'fully discussed' in the 1939 negotiations, but an understanding of the proper interpretation to be placed on Article XV had been confirmed in an exchange of letters between Norman Rogers and Riverdale. 'Canadian pupils would be incorporated in or organized as units and formations of the RCAF in the field,' Ralston observed, leaving little doubt that 'the view apparently taken ... by the Air Staff was quite inconsistent with the understanding which had been reached with the UK representatives.'[44]

With the first BCATP graduates soon scheduled to go overseas, it was time for someone to take up the detailed methods by which they would be formed into RCAF squadrons; but, in light of what had happened, the Cabinet decided that Ralston, not Power, was the man for the job, and it was added to the itinerary planned for his forthcoming visit to London. It was not only Power whose competence was being questioned, however, for King's opinion of Breadner had also diminished, and not just because of the bad advice he had given his minister. During the presentation of air force estimates to the War Committee of the Cabinet 'there was an error of fifty millions' which was 'explained away as a sort of joke by Breadner who was representing the air officials. The Minister of the Department himself had known nothing of it.'[45]

Only the CAS was laughing. For his part, Power was busy reviewing the BCATP files, and within three days a chastened Breadner was instructed to produce a much-revamped paper outlining how Article XV could be implemented to reflect Cabinet policy and ensure that the overseas air force was not cast adrift.[46] Turning his back on the argument that the provision of Canadian groundcrew was a prerequisite to the formation of RCAF squadrons, the CAS now proposed that 'the number of squadrons to be designated RCAF or Canadian RAF should be in proportion to the Canadian output of the J[oint] A[ir] T[raining] P[lan], and its capacity for producing not only the initial strength of aircrews of such squadrons, but maintaining their total requirements in reinforcements.' After subtracting the aircrew graduates required in Canada as instructors or for the Home War Establishment, Breadner calculated that thirty-three RCAF squadrons could be formed overseas by October 1941, and seventy-two squadrons by April 1942, with a maximum of seventy-seven squadrons once the BCATP reached maturity.[47]

Ironically, it was now the turn of Overseas Headquarters to have second thoughts about the status of Canadian airmen in England. 'In order to secure equality of treatment, ensure smooth administration and for benefit of common cause,' Wing Commander A.P. Campbell explained, 'all RCAF personnel in UK should be under one control.'* To that end, there was no need for an Overseas Headquarters, and Breadner's earlier suggestion to reduce it to a liaison office seemed sensible. While the position of liaison officer should remain a senior appointment, Campbell added, he would need 'no executive authority except over own staff.'[48]

As we have seen, Air Vice-Marshal L.F. Stevenson, who arrived in London as air officer commanding in mid-October, had been apprised of the alleged goals of Canadian air policy before the embarrassing Cabinet meeting of 9 October (and before Breadner had revised his interpretation of Article XV). Consequently, he was being true to his original brief when, on 16 October, he

* Although his mother was Canadian and he had been born in Hamilton, Ontario, Campbell had spent his formative years in Scotland, where his father was an officer in the Black Watch and a member of parliament for North Ayrshire; as he would later acknowledge, his 'early associations were all a mixture of British Army and Scottish politics' - Canada was known 'only by hearsay.' As a result, it might be said that he came by his view of the RCAF as an appendage to the RAF honestly enough.

opened discussions with the Air Ministry in order to work out how the three existing RCAF overseas squadrons could be brought under RAF control, and to reduce the role of Overseas Headquarters to that of a liaison office. He also approached the director-general of organization, Air Vice-Marshal L.N. Hollinghurst, with a proposal apparently put forward by Campbell for the disposition of graduates of the air training plan, suggesting that a block of RAF squadron numbers be set aside for those units to which Canadian aircrew would be posted – a step that would not only recognize Canada's contribution but also might simplify the formation of RCAF squadrons once they could be provided with Canadian groundcrew. 'We agreed,' Hollinghurst confirmed two days later, 'that apart from any possible legal objections, there were moral objections to a Squadron being called RCAF squadron if the flying personnel only was Canadian, i.e. your chaps would feel that they were sailing under false colours.' At the same time, Hollinghurst was confident that the 'man in the street in Canada' would consider the RAF (Canada) units 'Canadian Squadrons from the word "go." '[49]

Both Stevenson and Hollinghurst felt that 'practical difficulties' of the sort adumbrated by Sir Kingsley Wood almost a year before would not only limit the number of RCAF squadrons to be formed, but also decree that none of them would be entirely Canadian and that not all Canadians would be posted to them.

> To ensure a degree of flexibility from the posting point of view, it would of course be necessary to limit the number of Squadrons so designated – this would mean that some of the RCAF trainees would serve in (British) RAF Squadrons until vacancies occurred in the RCAF or (Canadian) RAF Squadrons. In practice, however, I do not think it would be difficult to strike the happy mean – particularly as to start with the senior post in the Squadrons would have to be filled – in so far as they could not be filled by skimming the cream of the existing RCAF Squadrons – by loaned RAF personnel, Canadian or British, until the fledglings have worked their way up.[50]

Stevenson's short message to Ottawa describing his talks explained only his proposal for establishing a 'block of numbers for squadrons to be officered by Canadians,' adding that 'during initial stages RAF officers will predominate but gradually Canadians would take over.'[51]

Two days later he addressed the question of No 112 Squadron, which was currently 'serving together' as a non-operational, composite squadron providing reinforcements to both Nos 1 and 110 Squadrons, and so came under his jurisdiction. Since no RAF formation was willing to assume responsibility for such a mongrel unit, Stevenson recommended converting it either to a fighter or a bomber squadron, so that it could be turned over to RAF control and 'placed in combination,' thereby hastening the process by which he could turn his headquarters into a liaison office. And that, he believed, might also hasten the process by which RCAF officers were prepared for 'higher executive appointments overseas'; for 'if RAF given free hand in promotion personnel and administrative control of squadrons, and if this headquarters relinquishes

participation in these matters, consider RAF will take more interest in RCAF squadrons and personnel who may be attached.'[52]

Despite the arrival, on 26 October, of a warning not to open discussions with the Air Ministry on reducing the status of overseas headquarters, neither Stevenson nor Campbell had any inkling that almost everything they had done that month ran counter to their government's policy. Indeed, it was only on 31 October that Breadner informed them of some of the changes that had taken place almost three weeks before and what impact they would have both on their own status and the immediate future of the three RCAF squadrons already in England.[53]

Nothing, however, was said about the long-term possibility of organizing as many as seventy-seven squadrons from air training plan graduates. Stevenson's reply was limited to what he had been told and it may be that, in his emphasis on incorporating Canadian squadrons into RAF groups, he was labouring under the mistaken impression that, so far as Ottawa was concerned, the three squadrons already in England represented the total to be organized.

> Cabinet's desire to retain RCAF Headquarters in name at least was realized. Name comparatively unimportant but clarification [of] functions imperative. Unless Canada prepared to establish and operate a group, any lesser number of squadrons must be incorporated in RAF groups, and unless AOC Group has absolute administrative and operational control of his squadrons confusion, lack of interest and inefficiency must result … Therefore see no alternative but closer attachment RCAF squadrons acting in combination with RAF and withdrawal this Headquarters from active participation in squadrons affairs. Partial control RCAF squadrons this Headquarters tends [to] tie hands [the] RAF and threatens operational and administrative efficiency.[54]

Given what AFHQ knew about recent Cabinet decisions relating to Article XV and the government's interpretation of the Visiting Forces Act, Stevenson's insistence on granting the RAF 'absolute administrative and operational control' over Canadian airmen should have set off alarm bells in Ottawa. Why it failed to do so cannot be explained by the documents but, as we shall see, time and again senior air officers in Canada evinced little interest in maintaining a distinct RCAF organization overseas. Perhaps their minds were fully occupied with the immense problems of the BCATP. As for Stevenson, living in London under the ever-present threat of Luftwaffe bombing, his affinity for 'operational and administrative efficiency' in order to guarantee Britain's survival, no matter what their effect on Canada's contribution to the air war, was perhaps understandable.

All the to-ing and fro-ing between December 1939 and October 1940 about where Canadian aircrew would serve happened because, as we have seen earlier, the discussions to hammer out just what Article XV meant had not yet taken place. Ottawa's interest in re-opening these discussions – and the importance of giving the RCAF due recognition – was made clear to the British high commissioner in Ottawa, Sir Gerald Campbell, on 17 October. BCATP graduates

would soon be crossing the Atlantic in large numbers, necessitating some decision, but 'the underlying reason at this juncture,' Sir Gerald recorded, was that air minister Power saw 'the day coming when Australian squadrons, fighting under their own name, will achieve fame in the Near East and his political position will become extremely delicate if he is unable to point to RCAF squadrons formed in the United Kingdom out of airmen trained under the Joint Air Training Plan [JATP]* ready for similar feats should the occasion arise. When I asked him about ground crews, he said that the provision of ground crews from Canada would be absolutely impossible in view of the large number of training fields and aerodromes being established here, not only for the Joint Air Training Plan but for our own schools which are being sent over, and he did not think that we could hold Canada responsible for not supplying ground crews. He did not like the idea of all Canadian squadrons being RAF (Canada).'[55]

Power's opinions counted for little in London. Ignoring what he had said about not providing Canadian groundcrew and RAF (Canada) squadrons, the EATS committee advised Campbell to pass on the gist of the Hollinghurst/Stevenson discussions about allocating blocks of numbers to the various dominions 'without of course disclosing the origin of the proposals so as not to compromise Air Commodore Stevenson in any way.'[56]

When he raised the subject with Power and Ralston on 16 November, Sir Gerald concluded that, while they might be moved, King would not. 'The impasse holds,' he informed the Dominions Office, 'and although the Chief of the Air Staff of the Royal Canadian Air Force has had some success in convincing his Minister of the difficulties inherent in a demand for more than a token number of RCAF Squadrons, and although Colonel Ralston appeared to have an open mind, I understand that the Prime Minister, supported by some of his colleagues, is still insisting on the establishment of RCAF squadrons to the full extent which he now calculates at 77 squadrons. It is still argued that this is Canada's chief war effort, [and] that the Canadian people must be allowed to know and share the achievements of their airmen.'[57] Based on his conversation with the two ministers, Sir Gerald anticipated that Ralston would 'endeavour to get the maximum number of squadrons possible designated RCAF' in his upcoming negotiations in London, 'though he may limit his demand to a figure proportionate to Canada's contribution to the JATP.'[58]

Taking somewhat better notice of Canadian concerns (but no less determined to maintain control over postings and to resist forming 'a disproportionately high number of RCAF squadrons,' particularly if RAF groundcrew were to be involved), the EATS Committee used a new set of calculations – the so-called 'manpower basis' – to arrive at a new size for the RCAF overseas.

> This basis would give Canada an ultimate total of 27 squadrons which would be built up to gradually and would, it is hoped, be reached by February, 1942.

* Alternate term occasionally used in place of Empire Air Training Scheme.

These 27 squadrons, together with the 3 RCAF squadrons already in England, would give Canada a total of 30 RCAF squadrons in the theatre of war, and it is suggested that an endeavour should be made to settle the question on the basis of allowing Canada that number of RCAF squadrons.[59]

Under the impression that all Canadian aircrew would serve in RCAF squadrons with RAF groundcrew, however, the Cabinet War Committee in Ottawa had begun to focus on Breadner's calulation of seventy-seven squadrons as the ultimate size of the RCAF overseas. It was that number which Ralston mentioned when he spoke to the British high commissioner on 16 November, and that seems to have been the number in his mind when he took off for England a few days later.[60]

Flying the Atlantic at the end of November in the unheated fuselage of a bomber, the sixty-year-old Ralston suffered a severe chill which brought on a crippling case of sciatica that forced him to conduct most of his business while in pain and confined to a wheelchair. His illness also forced the Air Ministry to alter its strategy in dealing with him. Officials had originally hoped to take him on a tour of RAF headquarters and stations in advance of opening talks on Article XV, in the belief that it would 'broaden his outlook' if he were 'allowed to absorb some of the spirit of Britain and particularly obtain an insight into the actual work of the RAF' before speaking for the RCAF. Yet Ralston's initial confinement to a London hospital, where he experienced the German 'Blitz' first hand, and his later forays into the East End, where 'entire blocks of flats and other dwellings had been smashed to rubble, and the air-raid wardens helped the homeless hundreds in trying to salvage a few pitiful remains or recover the bodies of their loved ones,' may have achieved the same purpose. Although he would not admit to having been anglicized by his experience, Ralston told Mackenzie King on his return that 'he felt the situation for Britain was much more terrible than people realized' and 'that everything possible should be done to help win.'[61] His outlook may also have been influenced after meeting the pilots of No 1 Squadron, RCAF, shortly after landing in the United Kingdom. 'They felt that all RCAF pilots coming from Canada who were not needed for RCAF reinforcements, should be pooled with the RAF, with the understanding that the RAF, in posting these Canadians to RAF units would keep them together as much as possible ... I got a distinct impression that there was no desire on the part of these pilots, for distinctive Canadian formation, over and above such units as would be self-contained, ie., complete both in Canadian aircrews and Canadian groundcrews.'[62]

Since Breadner would not arrive in London until after the Article XV negotiations had been largely concluded, Ralston had to rely primarily on Stevenson for assistance, with help from Lester Pearson at the Canadian High Commission. Although everyone agreed that Canadian graduates could not be simply enrolled in the RAF, 'with individual identification only,' Stevenson and Canada House were poles apart in the advice they tendered. The former was still enamoured of the scheme he and Hollinghurst had concocted to create a block of 'Canadian' squadrons in the RAF, primarily because it would enhance