

we shall ... very soon arrive at the stage where most of the operational squadrons are manned by coloured troops.' That would be unfortunate because, from his perspective, 'the British, being in general better educated and more amenable to discipline, are apt to be quicker in the uptake during the complicated training which has to be given.'⁴

Happily – and usefully – Harris kept his opinions to himself when he met with the Canadian air minister at High Wycombe on 19 August. Hosting a Canadian delegation that also included Breadner, Edwards, and the recently appointed AOC of the Canadian group, Air Vice-Marshal G.E. Brookes, Sir Arthur presented himself as one of the RCAF's greatest supporters, even agreeing 'to the principle of withdrawing complete RCAF crews from RAF squadrons or to assist existing units which had suffered abnormal losses. He also promised full support in forming complete RCAF crews at OTU's'⁵ and went on to assure his guests 'that he believed the details could be worked out most effectively.' Power was clearly impressed with Harris's remarkable, if not altogether genuine, performance. 'As a matter of fact, when we did see Harris, he was most co-operative and expressed the willingness to help us in every way, and, of all the senior Officers we have met overseas on our two trips, Harris has put himself out more than anyone else, thus belieing [sic] the reputation which has been built up for him both by our people and by the UK authorities.'⁶

Other RAF senior officers appeared equally cooperative. Fighter Command agreed to convert Redhill, Digby, and Fairwood Common into completely Canadianized RCAF stations and suggested that 'at a later date, it may be possible to allocate a sector in No 11 Group area to the RCAF.' On the surface, at least, Power's trip seemed to reaffirm the positive atmosphere that had emerged from the Ottawa conference, and he assured Mackenzie King that the contacts he had 'renewed with the many senior officials of the United Kingdom Government will have done much to improve relations of the RCAF in the United Kingdom.'⁷ Nevertheless, a cautionary note had already been sounded at the end of June by Overseas Headquarters' war diarist, who noted the continuing strained relationship between Overseas Headquarters and the Air Ministry. 'A factor which should be recorded is that of a sense of frustration which dogs our efforts here. While it may be unfair to say that Air Ministry personnel are not fully co-operative with this office, a distinct impression is conveyed that we have a nuisance purpose only. Thus it is difficult to develop a real effort for mutual helpfulness and assistance with the Air Ministry. This attitude does nothing to increase the effectiveness of our work.'⁸

Over the course of the next six months, the Air Ministry's failure to meet all its Ottawa obligations – and the perception that it often considered Overseas Headquarters irrelevant – turned Edwards's initial optimism to disappointment and despair. The first indication that his status was not all he had hoped came in August, when the Air Ministry did not inform him in advance that RCAF squadrons would take part in the raid on Dieppe, for consultation of that kind, he believed, was 'within the spirit' of the Ottawa agreement. In fact, the unorthodox process by which Operation Jubilee came to be launched and the

need to limit knowledge of the raid to those directly in the chain of command were, perhaps, reason enough for him not to have been forewarned; but from an air force perspective there was an even more compelling excuse for the Air Ministry's failure to contact the Canadian AOC-in-C. Unique an event as the raid was in its scale for the navy and army, for Fighter Command it was little more than another in a long series of fighter-sweeps over France and not notably larger than a number of earlier ones (see chapters 5 and 6).⁹

Justified or not, the unhelpful impression left by Dieppe was not improved when Edwards contacted the Air Ministry in September to implement Ottawa's instructions 'to make the necessary arrangements ... for the establishment by the RAF of a central posting organization and record office' as provided for in the Ottawa agreement. To help overcome the impediments to Canadianization presented by the British system of decentralized postings, the AOC-in-C also proposed setting up a board, 'with myself as president and with a limited number of members of senior rank from the Air Ministry and this Headquarters,' to 'deal with the broader policy of posting affecting RCAF personnel'.¹⁰

That did not sit well with the new RAF air member for personnel (AMP), Air Marshal Sir Bertine Sutton, who, while acknowledging that there had been some difficulties, nevertheless observed (somewhat less than honestly) that the terms of the Ottawa agreement were 'in fact implemented by there being a central posting organization, namely the Air Ministry, in the posting branch of which there is RCAF representation.' Trying to bypass Sutton, Edwards pressed ahead with the establishment of a Personnel Reception Centre (PRC) at Bournemouth 'controlled functionally by RCAF Overseas Headquarters.' Of course, neither the PRC nor Overseas Headquarters would have any influence over postings from the AFUs – that remained Flying Training Command's responsibility – but Edwards apparently hoped that if all-Canadian crews were assembled by the RCAF staff at Bournemouth, RAF authorities would subsequently keep them together throughout their operational training.¹¹

Unfortunately, No 3 (RCAF) PRC was failing to meet its objectives soon after opening on 1 November 1942. 'The intention of the Ottawa agreement was to create a Canadian Personnel Reception Centre and thereby place control of postings [from the PRC] under this Headquarters,' Curtis explained only three weeks later, but 'this has not worked out in practice. At present PRC is responsible to 54 Group and in turn to [Flying Training] Command and Air Ministry in all matters and not this Headquarters. RAF Station Headquarters was superimposed on the Canadian PRC recently, and although commanded by a Canadian, the purpose is defeated.' As a result, postings from Bournemouth continued to be handled by 'a small selection and posting organization' run by two RAF officers that was 'independent of the station and reports direct to Training Command.' It was not until the following summer that an agreement was reached that would allow the RCAF to staff the aircrew selection boards at 3 PRC.¹²

At the same time, however, Edwards was making considerable gains in establishing an RCAF presence throughout Great Britain. Beginning in September he had divided the United Kingdom into seven geographical districts 'to

facilitate the work of his field personnel' – including chaplains, public relations officers, doctors, and supervisors of auxiliary services – and to provide a 'channel of communication for RCAF personnel on matters concerning their RCAF career, pay, allowances, promotion, remusterings, etc.' As a result, district headquarters were established (in numerical order) in London, Exeter, Huntingdon, Birmingham, York, Edinburgh and Inverness. Similarly, the ever-increasing number of Canadian aircrew serving in the Mediterranean and the Far East led to the opening of a District Headquarters, Middle East, in Cairo on 25 September 1942 and another in Delhi, India, the following summer.¹³

Edwards enjoyed less success when it came to creating a 'War Room' at his headquarters. Since returning from Ottawa, Edwards had 'been endeavouring to have established in this Headquarters a War Room which will accumulate information from the Air Ministry and the War Office, so that I may have a complete picture at all times of the war situation at any given moment. Air Ministry are offering a certain amount of resistance to the idea and are loath to release to me the information which I would require.' Power had taken the matter up during his August visit but had wisely – and more accurately – referred to it as an 'RCAF Intelligence Room.' He tied the question to his own desire 'to issue *communiqués* covering RCAF operations in this country and also to have more information of an operational nature on hand than was at present made available.' As he explained to wary Air Ministry officials, 'he felt that the RCAF should issue its own *communiqués* just as he understood the US Air Forces were doing. He wanted the Canadian people to feel they were in the war and to stimulate recruiting.' Despite Sir Archibald Sinclair's suggestion that 'the Canadian public could ... be kept fully informed by other means,' the RCAF was granted the right to release its own *communiqués* to the Canadian press.¹⁴

While Edwards's War Room did not begin functioning until the new year – the Air Ministry remained 'a little loath to allow us to attach an officer to their war room for experience, and to supply us with all the up-to-date "gen"' – the RCAF released its first *communiqué* on 9 September stating that 'members of an RCAF bomber squadron took part in the raid on Frankfurt last night and returned without losing a crew.'¹⁵ Intended for North American release only, it nonetheless appeared in London's evening papers – to the chagrin of the Air Ministry but much to the satisfaction of Overseas Headquarters.

The first RCAF Overseas *Communiqué* was issued this date in the form of a flash. It was passed by AI 6, Air Ministry, approved by the DAOC-in-C and released by the Ministry of Information at 1240 hours ... Repercussions from this publication were widespread. G[roup] C[aptain] Heald, in charge of AI 6, was sent for by the Secretary of State, the Vice Chief of the Air Staff and the Permanent Under Secretary also being present. G/C Heald was instructed to take all possible steps to prevent any further RCAF announcements being issued in the UK. It was considered that other Allied Nations would request the same privilege which would seriously interfere with the RAF *Communiqué*. A ridiculous note was sounded when the *Times*

enquired if this was the first occasion that a Canadian squadron had operated over Germany.¹⁶ If this enquiry is indicative of the English papers' knowledge of the activities of Canadian squadrons, it would appear that the issuance of such *communiqués* has been too long delayed and that efforts should be made to have them continue. This appearance of an RCAF *communiqué* in the British Press was welcomed by RCAF personnel who have always felt that Canadians did not receive enough mention in the RAF *communiqués*.¹⁷

Even as Overseas Headquarters was savouring its public-relations triumph, a storm of controversy was breaking in the Canadian press. On 5 September, in a candid but 'off the record' discussion with a group of visiting Canadian journalists about the problems of Canadianization, Edwards had imprudently criticized the editorial policy of several Canadian newspapers, observing that 'some people are talking a lot of bloody nonsense about splitting the Empire. If Canadians who see it from that point of view want to be mugs all their lives, that's their business. I can see no reason against Canadianization.'¹⁸

When asked which papers he was referring to, Edwards replied, '[John] Bassett's paper in Montreal [the *Gazette*] and George McCullagh's in Toronto [the *Globe and Mail*].'¹⁹ According to the *Gazette* reporter present, Edwards 'threw in the remark ... more by way of carrying on the discussion than by making any deliberate attack on the newspapers in question,'²⁰ but the leaked comments provided those papers opposed to Canadianization with fresh ammunition. Breadner quickly cabled Edwards to inform him that 'your statement to Canadian editors as reported on this side ... is causing very considerable furore here.'

Bassett talked half hour with Minister and dealt at length on your lack of diplomacy. *Gazette* in editorial headed 'Air Marshal Edwards is Wrong' categorically denied your charge and stated you must have been misinformed. This morning's [Ottawa] *Journal* carries full column editorial generally upbraiding you. Have not yet seen *Globe and Mail* reaction. Minister feels however that whole of Press in Canada will take up cudgels and that members during next session will make strong attacks on the Government. Discussed this question at length with Minister this morning who requests I wire you and ask that you give serious consideration to an immediate statement notifying all concerned that you had been misinformed as to the attitude of the papers concerned. I feel certain that only by such action can you save the government, this department and yourself any unnecessary headache and that present snowball of criticism levelled at yourself will become an avalanche directed at you for the sole purpose of causing your removal.²¹

* The first RCAF participation in a raid on Germany had come fifteen months earlier and, by this time, four squadrons were involved in the strategic bombing campaign on a more or less regular basis.

Based on the editorial opinion of the Ottawa *Journal*, Edwards appeared to be in trouble. 'Apart altogether from his bad language it looks to us as though Air Officer-in-Chief Edwards should keep his mouth shut about government policy or any public discussion of government policy ... It is to be hoped that Air Minister Power will not make a fool of this country and do an evil in the war by any interference with the complete control of the Royal Air Force over the direction of the Canadian air help. Any Canadianization which may mean any divisibility of air command or even merely multiplying jobs or increase the personal importance of officers like AOC Edwards seems to us, if we may be pardoned for quoting the gentleman's own phrase, to be "bloody nonsense."²¹

Reiterating its view that Canadianization posed a threat to a united British Empire, the *Globe and Mail* was also critical of Power.²² However, the *Gazette* not only made it clear that it did not oppose the government's policy, but Bassett also insisted that Edwards 'retract [the] allegation his paper is anti-Canadianization.'²³ The worst of the storm had been weathered but, in response to a strong appeal from Breadner, Edwards released a statement that he was 'very pleased to learn that the information I had received that the Montreal *Gazette* and *The Globe and Mail* of Toronto were opposed to the concentration of Canadian flyers in Canadian organizations, is not true.' He also suggested that the entire controversy 'might be a good thing if it were made clear once again to the people of Canada that so called Canadianization of the RCAF has nothing to do with combat control, which must obviously be exercised by a single operational agency, but is designed solely to advance the efficiency and well-being of our lads for the benefit of the common cause.'²⁴

Edwards' retraction safeguarded his appointment as AOC-in-C, but the 'Battle of the Bloody Nonsense,' as he called it, had produced an interesting and valuable insight into the state of Canadian public opinion. Although a June 1942 public-opinion survey had found 51 per cent of Canadians opposed to the idea of a 'separate' air force overseas and only 31 per cent in favour,²⁵ the Gallup organization had not extended its questioning to examine attitudes to the issue of grouping Canadian airmen into RCAF squadrons – which was, after all, the essential substance of Canadianization. Had they done so, if editorial opinion in the wake of Edwards's remarks is any indication, the pollsters would have received a quite different response. For contrary to Power's initial fears that 'the whole of Press in Canada will take up cudgels,' only the *Globe and Mail*, the *Ottawa Journal*, and the *Toronto Telegram* were unalterably opposed to Canadianization. The Kitchener *Daily Record*, for example, observed that 'grouped solidly together, our boys will be happier and will fight with that team spirit that is so necessary in winning victories,' while the *Winnipeg Free Press* ridiculed the *Globe and Mail*'s 'absurd hullabuloo,' particularly in light of the demands it was making to commission all RCAF air-crew.²⁶ To the *Vancouver Daily Province*, 'the storm was largely synthetic, with the air marshal an innocent victim.'

The RAF and the RCAF are fighting the same battle in the same spirit and with the same determination. There is no suggestion anywhere that the RCAF should operate indepen-

dently or under its own command ... Men from Canada are more at home in their daily lives, with other men from Canada. To overcome discrimination in rates of pay and other difficulties it is well that, so far as possible without weakening the joint effort, Canadian airmen should serve in Canadian squadrons. For that purpose, as more men come from the training centres, additional Canadian squadrons should be organized, and men already serving in the RAF should have the opportunity, as conditions make it possible, of becoming attached to them.*²⁷

The attitude of airmen overseas to Canadianization was a topic in a 'Morale Survey' conducted in the fall of 1942. Beginning in September, and for the next three months, two RCAF officers, Squadron Leaders J.D. Parks and G. Vlastos, visited some 'thirty RAF and RCAF stations.' Meeting 'several hundred officers and airmen of the RCAF not only on the stations visited but also, more casually, on trains, in hotels, clubs, restaurants, etc.' they concluded that 'morale is fundamentally sound'; and where there was friction between British and Canadian personnel (and the greatest desire on the part of the latter to serve in Canadian units), it was found predominantly among RCAF other ranks. Parks and Vlastos confirmed that there was 'a certain degree of truth in allegations made by RAF and RCAF officers that Canadian airmen are harder to discipline than other airmen in the RAF,' but attributed much of the difference to their North American outlook.

Canadians have no veneration for spit-and-polish. And they dislike discipline when it appears as the arbitrary will of a person in a superior rank. They must feel that discipline makes sense before they accept it whole-heartedly. When it goes flatly against common sense they despise it. On one station in the Shetlands where the weather is often foul, we found Canadians very bitter over orders which forbade them to wear their:

- (i) crewneck sweaters to and from work;
- (ii) rain-coats unless it was actually raining (though the rain might start at any moment);
- (iii) socks rolled over the tops of their rubber-boots (according to common Canadian practice).²⁸

Other rank morale also suffered from the two services' differing attitudes towards promotion.

The Canadian airman expects to get ahead fast. If he enlisted during the first year of the war, he is apt to think of himself as an old-timer, and regard two or three stripes as his due. The RAF flight-sergeant who took five years or more to get his third stripe may look askance at such exalted aspirations in a mere novice. In seniority and experience the Canadian is at a heavy disadvantage when assimilated to a longer-established organization like the RAF. If he is promoted in spite of this

* Support was also expressed in the *Toronto Star*, the *London Free Press*, the *Financial Post*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, the *Edmonton Journal*, and Quebec's *L'Action Catholique*.

disadvantage, there will be jealousy and bad feeling among the RAF men; if not, he will compare his status with that of his friends who are getting better advancement at home, and he will complain bitterly that he is being penalized because of his overseas service.

'Shadow-roster' promotions have eased this situation. But the Canadian airman who is an LAC in Britain and a Corporal in Canada feels something strange about this double life. He is apt to say to himself that, since he belongs to the RCAF, not the RAF, he is *really* a Corporal; and he will then blame the RAF for keeping his stripes off his sleeve in Britain.²⁹

If nothing else, the Parks-Vlastos survey indicated that, as with the public at home, there was genuine support for the government's air policy among servicemen in the United Kingdom. 'Canadianization is being welcomed by most of the officers and practically all of the airmen with whom we discussed it.'

The predominant feeling seemed to be that:

- (a) Canadian airmen are best disciplined by Canadian officers and NCOs;
- (b) Canadian procedure with respect to promotions, remusterings, etc. is best administered by Canadian officers and NCOs;
- (c) Canadians make the best COS of RCAF squadrons (we met two RAF COS of RCAF squadrons, and neither seemed a great success as a leader, though they were both experienced flyers and fighters);
- (d) Nevertheless, Canadianization should not break up operational crews. And it should not pull a Canadian out of an RAF squadron unless he himself desires the change.³⁰

These findings were supported by evidence from the operational training units, where it was apparent that 'Canadian trainees, particularly NCOs ... favour all-Canadian or substantially Canadian crews.'³¹ Whitehall, however, continued to be uncooperative. Only a week after rejecting Edwards's request to establish a central postings organization to oversee Canadianization, Sir Bertie Sutton wrote to the Canadian AOC-in-C to assert 'that complete Canadianization is an impossibility.' Using Ottawa's figures for the projected four-weekly output of RCAF personnel from the BCATP, he claimed that the training scheme in Canada was responsible for all the difficulties.

If the Bomber intakes were limited to the [RCAF] aircrew in smallest supply, we could form 101 complete [heavy bomber] crews per 4 weeks (excluding Flight Engineers) [which were remustered from groundcrew and posted to the Heavy Conversion Units], and would then have rather over 200 Navigators and 200 Air Bombers surplus, who would have to team up in RAF, RAAF or RNZAF squadrons; we would also have 468 pilots (not all of whom could go to fighters as there wouldn't be the vacancies), and 30 spare [air gunners].

You will see therefore, that complete Canadianisation is an impossibility, short of tearing up the whole established training organisation in Canada and remodelling it to match the present requirements of aircrew by categories. Even supposing this were

possible, proportionate requirements of the different aircrew categories change from month to month as the expansion proceeds, and, of course, change even more violently if the crew composition of aircraft is altered to meet new operational policies ...

The best we can ever do is to say that *as far as possible* we will endeavour to match RCAF crews in Article XV squadrons although there will always be instances when odd crews must be made up by RAF, RNZAF and RAAF personnel. As far as matching crews in other squadrons is concerned, this is, and always will be a physical impossibility.³²

Sutton's argument ignored the fact that Edwards's immediate goal was to fill the existing RCAF squadrons with Canadian aircrew, not to form all-RCAF crews for RAF squadrons. While the AMP's letter implied that 101 all-Canadian crews fell short of Canada's Article XV requirements, the actual needs of the five existing RCAF bomber squadrons was only thirty crews every four weeks, even when allowing a generous supply of six crews per squadron per four-week period. Taking into account the six new squadrons to be formed in October and November, the RCAF still required only sixty-six crews per month, of which eighteen would need a flight engineer and an extra air gunner. Far from demonstrating the impossibility of complete Canadianization, Sutton's totals would, in theory, have allowed the RCAF to man seventeen bomber, fifty twin-engined fighter, and sixty-seven single-seat fighter or army cooperation squadrons with all-Canadian crews.³³

Edwards passed the AMP's comments on to Ottawa, emphasizing 'the necessity for matching [aircrew] before embarkation wherever practical.'³⁴ He clearly believed, however, that RAF antipathy to Canadianization was on the increase.

It has been felt that for some time there has been a strong anti-Canadianization feeling existing in certain circles of the RAF but it is one of those intangible things which is sensed rather than seen. The general impression is that pressure is quietly being brought to bear by deed and word of mouth with a view to impressing on RCAF personnel the benefit of remaining with RAF units. This is particularly noticeable where there are small numbers of Canadian personnel at RAF units and by suggestion every inducement is held out to Canadians to retain an RAF attachment rather than a straight RCAF membership. Much stress is laid upon the Empire idea of mixed crews but the opponents of Canadianization naturally omit the fact that posting to a straight RCAF squadron has many additional benefits which are well known to members of the Article XV squadrons.

Since the anti-Canadianization feeling appears to be increasing, I can see no other alternative but to take the whole question up on a Government to Government basis. This seems to be the only solution to a vexacious problem. While I am loth to recommend this action, Canadianization has been accepted as a policy but, to some extent, has been accepted in certain quarters of the RAF in the nature of a challenge. It is essential, therefore, that the question be settled once and for all.³⁵

At the end of October Edwards left on a two-month tour of the Mediterranean, India, and Ceylon. By the time he returned to London, the most encour-

aging development was the progress made in creating a Canadian bomber group. Six new squadrons had been formed in No 4 Group during October and November, bringing the RCAF total to eleven, and a good beginning had been made in placing Canadian aircrew in the first two of them. By year's end, Nos 424 and 426 squadrons were 79 and 73 per cent RCAF in aircrew, respectively. Less satisfactory results were achieved with the other four, Nos 427, 428, 429, and 431, when they were formed in early November: despite receiving a nucleus of ten crews from 419 Squadron, No 427 was only 54 per cent Canadian, while No 428 was slightly better at 57 per cent. Nos 429 and 431, meanwhile, were only 33.6 and 16.7 per cent Canadian by the end of December.³⁶

Refusing to accept any responsibility, and suggesting that a decision taken in March 1941 was 'fairly recent,' Bomber Command's senior training officer, Air Vice-Marshal A.J. Capel, explained the poor results in early January 1943.

It must be remembered, however, that the decision to have all Canadian and Australian squadrons has been a fairly recent decision and consequently it will take some time before the designated OTUs turn out a sufficient number of Dominion crews to fill and to replace wastage in the Dominion Squadrons. It is perhaps not realised that, for example, a crew which reached a heavy Operational Squadron on November 7th was posted into an OTU on July 15th, and it will further be realised that on July 15th no rapid expansion of Bomber Command was in view, the Canadian Group and the large number of Canadian Squadrons had not been even discussed* and the fact that 3 more Australian Squadrons would be formed was not known. For this reason, no pre-arranged plan could be made to produce the correct number of Dominion crews between October 1st and November 7th when the majority of these new Dominion Squadrons formed.³⁷

Capel's recollection of events ignored the large numbers of RCAF aircrew, of all categories, that had been fed into the OTUs the previous spring, totals that vastly exceeded the needs of Canada's Article XV squadrons. In the two-month period from mid-May to mid-July 1942, for example, No 3 PRC had posted a total of 2281 Canadian aircrew – 921 pilots, 537 observers, 374 wireless operators, and 449 air gunners – to Flying Training Command. These men, who still had to complete their AFU and OTU training, did not emerge from the operational training pipeline until October and November. Since the four-weekly aircrew requirements for all squadrons overseas, even after the formation of the six new bomber squadrons, amounted to only 498 aircrew (consisting of 139 pilots, 93 navigators, 66 air bombers, 84 wireless operators, 89 air gunners, 21 flight engineers, 3 FME/AGs, and 3 WOM/AGs), there would still have been more than 1200 aircrew available to fill the new squadrons – provided the RAF posted them to the OTUs backing the Canadian squadrons.³⁸

* In fact, the Canadian Bomber Group Progress Committee had met for the first time on 3 July with Bomber Command representation.

Since that did not happen, the Canadianization figures that confronted Edwards on his return to London were bitterly disappointing. After a full year of cajoling, pleading, and badgering the Air Ministry, the number of Canadian aircrew in RCAF squadrons at the end of December 1942 stood at only 68.1 per cent, a decline of 2.6 per cent from the previous June. Given the steady flow of over 5000 RCAF aircrew that had arrived in the United Kingdom in the first six months of the year – two to three times as many as were required by RCAF squadrons – Air Ministry protests that Canadianization presented insurmountable difficulties appear hollow, particularly when those same officials did not experience similar problems posting far more limited selections of Polish, Czech, Norwegian, or Free French aircrew to their respective national squadrons.³⁹

The simplest solution would have been to allow Canada to control RCAF postings and remove the burden of Canadianization entirely from the hands of reluctant RAF officers, but since that option had been fiercely resisted by the Air Ministry at the Ottawa conference, Edwards's ability to influence the situation had remained as ethereal as ever. That did not stop Ottawa from continuing to press Overseas Headquarters for some improvement in the situation, however, and on 9 January 1943 Breadner cabled Edwards 'that the total Canadian aircrew in each of the following squadrons is less than 60 per cent: Squadrons 418, 422 and 423. Why?'⁴⁰ Eleven days later, the CAS questioned why the '4 most recently formed bomber squadrons, Nos 427, 428, 429, and 431 are commanded by RAF personnel. Also that percentage of Canadian aircrew Nos 429 and 431 only 33.61 and 16.67 respectively.'⁴¹

Breadner's prodding evidently convinced Edwards that it was time for a showdown with the Air Ministry over its apparent inability to convert policy into practice. The AOC-in-C went straight to the heart of the matter and, in his signal to Ottawa, laid the blame where it clearly belonged.

I could not agree more with your query. The answer is simply for reasons that I have given you many times during the past year. The question of manning RCAF Squadrons with one hundred per cent Canadian aircrew has been continually referred to Air Ministry authorities ever since my arrival overseas. We all appreciate that certain difficulties were apparent but as over a year has now elapsed since the problems were realized I can see no reason why our objective should not have been reached by now and can only conclude that for some reason unknown to us an attempt is being made to frustrate the implementation of this policy. I have today sent an official letter to the Air Ministry pointing out that sufficient time has now elapsed to put into effect any necessary corrective measures and bearing in mind the large number of RCAF Aircrew arriving in this country and the small proportion required by our Canadian units, there is no reason why the Canadianization of our squadrons should not have been completed long ago. I have requested that instructions be issued that no RCAF aircrew are to be posted from the United Kingdom except to Canadian units until the RCAF squadrons have one hundred per cent RCAF aircrew and that I am recommending to you that this Headquarters take over the postings and records of all RCAF personnel. This I do hereby recommend most strongly. The numbers required to completely Canadianize our

squadrons are so small as compared with the numbers arriving in this country that this whole question is ridiculous ... The fault lies with the provisions of the JATP Agreement whereby our personnel are turned over to the RAF for disposal and while we can recall any officer or airman it is subject to operational expediency, the final decision on which rests with the RAF. The expression 'operational expediency' is used greatly, almost to the same extent that many shortcomings are hidden behind the expression 'there is a war on' ... To give you some idea of the atmosphere, one member of the Air Council advised me that if my Headquarters had never been formed it would have made no difference to the war. It is easy to be wise after the event but we should never have participated in the JATP but should instead have built up an Air Force of our own. I have sent a copy of this signal to the Air Ministry. Only 585 aircrew required to complete Canadianization our squadrons and yet there are approximately 8518 RCAF aircrew in the UK excluding Bournemouth where there are 4000 aircrew, the majority being RCAF.⁴²

As his deputy, Curtis, later recalled, the direct approach was in keeping with Edwards's character.

He was having a lot of trouble with the Air Ministry on Canadianization and he wrote a letter – or signal – to the effect that the RAF was not co-operating and that we would be better off by ourselves. He sent this over to Power. When I came into his office at nine o'clock he showed me the signal. I said, 'You didn't send that?' He said, 'Oh yes I did – four hours ago.' I asked him why he didn't let me see it so that we could talk it over. He replied, 'If I did that you would have talked me out of it and I didn't want that to happen' ...

I don't know just what set him off. It may have been something he thought of in the night because he sent the message to Canada in the morning – a few hours before the sun was up. But he was under quite a bit of pressure from Canada and had to report every month on Canadianization.⁴³

Edwards's letter to the Air Ministry, which charged that British officials were always well prepared with excuses but were never ready to take corrective action, was equally blunt.

I am at a loss to know why the implementation of the Canadianization policy is proceeding so slowly and can only assume that it is being unfavourably received in certain quarters of the RAF to such an extent that progress is being retarded.

Canadian aircrew have been proceeding, in very large numbers, to the United Kingdom for almost three years and it is difficult to understand why the small proportion required to fill the Canadian squadrons could not be provided. This is particularly disturbing as it could so easily have been arranged, without disrupting other units, if it had been implemented through initial postings ...

I regret very much that it is necessary to write a letter of this nature, but I do think that the co-operation which we anticipated has not been given. We, on our part, have done everything possible to carry out the provisions of the JATP Agreement. You will note ... that thousands of groundcrew personnel are being posted overseas. This, as

you know, is not part of the agreement and is being done in order that the RCAF may provide greater assistance. It seems rather futile, however, to send such large numbers of groundcrew, which involves the taking up of valuable shipping space, when the simple matter of posting aircrew, in small numbers from the thousands available, cannot be arranged without ill feeling.⁴⁴

As Edwards had expected, his letter did not go unchallenged, the task of responding falling to Sir Bertine Sutton and the director-general of postings, Air Vice-Marshal J.J. Breen. Using a carefully woven combination of irrelevant, misleading, and false information, the latter immediately prepared a memorandum concluding that posting Canadian aircrew to RCAF squadrons was too difficult an undertaking ever to prove successful. Breen claimed that 'arrivals of air crew personnel have always been irregular' and pointed to the low number of pilots that had arrived in June and July 1942 even though Canadian pilots, at the Air Ministry's request, had not been sent overseas in those months because of the huge build-up of aircrew at Bournemouth. He also claimed that only eight Canadian pilots were available for posting from AFUS in January 1942 when, in fact, more than 1200 had arrived during the last three months of 1941. He then went on to state that this had delayed Canadianization because the intake into 'No 22 OTU, which is a Canadian OTU in Bomber Command,' had to be postponed, a deliberate misrepresentation since, as Breen was aware, the RCAF's bomber squadrons were spread over three groups in January 1942 and 22 OTU was not designated a Canadian OTU until the following September.⁴⁵

Subsequently, Breen's misrepresentation of the problems served as the basis for discussion at an emergency meeting of the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS) Committee the following day, which ended with Balfour's declaration 'that in view of the cogent reasons which had been advanced in explanation of our inability to proceed more rapidly with Canadianisation and the numerous explanations which had been given to RCAF Overseas Headquarters, he was at a loss to understand the statements in the letter and signal under discussion.' Perhaps sensing that the weakest link in the RCAF chain was at the top, the committee decided that the wisest course would be to have Sir Charles Portal invite his Canadian opposite number to London, to 'satisfy himself as to the steps taken by the Air Ministry to implement the policy of Canadianisation.'⁴⁶

As it was, the Air Ministry seemed to have a keener appreciation of what drove Power and Breadner than did Edwards. Having been constantly urged to Canadianize the RCAF Overseas as quickly as possible, the latter clearly expected Ottawa to support the position he had taken and to 'hear quite heavy [Air Ministry] reverberations.' 'You may expect an approach to the Canadian government through a different channel complaining of inaccuracy of my statements and protesting my lack of diplomacy,' he cabled on the 27th. 'As far as inaccuracy is concerned you have the answers. As far as diplomacy is concerned I have tried that for fourteen months.'⁴⁷ Breadner promptly cautioned Edwards that 'our signals were not intended to start you on the warpath,'⁴⁸ but the AOC-in-C remained convinced that 'this matter had to come to a head

sooner or later. It is either that my interpretation of what we want and what we are entitled to is wrong or else the Air Ministry is wrong. The only way to find out is to come out into the open. An understanding must be reached if I and my successors are to live a life that more nearly approaches one that is fit to live.⁴⁹

After discussing the situation with Power, Breadner sent Edwards a curiously tremulous response. 'Strongly urge you do not take up an uncompromising position. You did go off the deep end and apparently have stirred up much more hard feeling than subject warranted. Minister feels you should have made sure of his backing before going to bat. Possible therefore he may not be in position to support you in your action. You should do all in your power to pour oil on troubled waters and not under any circumstances go gunning. Would it help your position any if you returned here immediately to get things straight this end? If so let us know and come ahead. Nothing reported here yet and if you can stop it you should do so. Good luck.'⁵⁰

The last comment was particularly appropriate as Edwards could now feel the rug being pulled out from under him. 'Your cable strikes strange notes. You demand vigorous action and protest the slothful inactivity in pursuit of your declared policy. I fight for this and now must struggle both ways without aid. To compromise now would determine the end of the RCAF as an entity overseas. To pour oil on troubled waters would avail nothing. Coming home would bespeak weakness which I cannot accept. I have done all with firmness, candour and truth conscientiously believing that I was right. I stand or fall on that come what may.'⁵¹

The possibility of ending 'the RCAF as an entity overseas' might not have been particularly disturbing to Breadner, who had spent his first year as CAS trying to eliminate the RCAF Overseas anyway. Power's concerns were more political. Sensitive to the lack of trust that Mackenzie King placed in him, Power preferred to keep air force problems as far from the Cabinet table as possible.⁵² Despite his August boast to Balfour that he was 'fed up with going around asking favours' and was quite prepared to tell the RAF 'to go to hell'⁵³ if he encountered any opposition to Canadianization, that resolve now took a back seat to his overwhelming desire to have the entire matter kept quiet. In an effort to prevent the disagreement from reaching his colleagues, Power turned to the United Kingdom's high commissioner in Canada, Malcolm MacDonald, who promptly reported his conversation to London.

I had [a] conversation with Power yesterday evening about Edwards' letter to the Air Ministry ... He was extremely upset when he received Edwards' actual reply. He feared a first class row which would have been extremely embarrassing to all concerned including himself and the Canadian Government. It would have been very difficult for him to recall Edwards from his post on an issue connected with Canadianization in which Edwards would appear as the most eager champion of the policy. At the same time, he felt strongly that although he is himself, like Edwards, a keen supporter of Canadianization, Edwards' way of going about this business was seriously wrong. He felt extremely troubled as to what practical steps could be taken to avoid a serious

crisis when Portal's message to Breadner arrived. Power is deeply grateful to Portal both for his intervention and for its form. He feels that discussions between Portal and Breadner have a chance of clearing the whole matter up reasonably satisfactorily ...

He was most anxious to know whether I agreed that this was likely. I said that he could accept it as an unqualified fact that you and the Air Council wished to implement as quickly as was practicable the Canadianization policy as agreed between the two Governments and that he felt sure that Breadner's talks in the Air Ministry would lead to the re-establishment of a close understanding on that matter. I did not feel so confident that Edwards' personality was the right one for carrying out the Canadian part of co-operation in Britain. I much liked some of Edwards' qualities including his frankness and I also felt it was possible that this incident would leave consequences on the personal side which made the future difficult. I was sure however that our people in the Air Ministry and elsewhere in the RAF who were working with Edwards would not allow this incident to increase difficulties either personal or administrative in any way.

Power said that it would be difficult to bring Edwards back to Canada for the present at any rate. He clearly distrusts Edwards' inclination to make indiscreet statements to the press. But he said that if the present difficulty did not smooth out on the personal as well as other sides, he might have to consider bringing Edwards away from Britain for some other duty a little later on. He is however, hopeful that this will not be necessary. He told me that he would keep me fully informed of any matters arising out of all this and that if he wanted my informal help in any way would like to avail himself of it.

I do not think he intended me to telegraph to you as fully as this though he did not say that I should not do so. But what he was very anxious that I should convey to you and Portal is his very real gratitude to Portal for having saved an extremely awkward situation ...

It is no business of ours of course to influence the appointments of high officers in the RCAF. That is entirely the responsibility of the Minister and his advisers here. You would deplore and Power would resent any other situation. But he is the sort of man with whom I can discuss such matters on my own responsibility as a personal friend quite frankly and informally and without giving offence.⁵⁴

Not surprisingly, Power's renunciation of his AOC-in-C severely undermined the latter's position, while Breadner's hurried trip to London in early February only reinforced British intransigence. According to Vincent Massey, the Canadian CAS 'very nearly had to disown' Edwards in making his peace and, drawing the appropriate conclusions, the Air Ministry would continue to make little progress in Canadianizing the RCAF Overseas until 1944.⁵⁵

Whitehall's ruffled feathers having been smoothed, Breadner cabled Power that he was 'satisfied that Portal is out to ensure that when I return I will be able to report to you that under the difficult circumstances confronting them, Air Ministry are doing all that is possible and practicable.'⁵⁶ Other RCAF officers were less easily reassured, however. On 4 February Curtis and Air Commodore E.E. Middleton, the deputy air member for personnel at AFHQ, pointed out to Breen the extent to which the Air Ministry had failed to imple-

ment the Canadianization policy, and only after 'considerable discussion' was it finally 'agreed that the most serious difficulty in achieving 100% Canadianisation was the unpredictable output from the AFUS.' Even then, it was up to one of the RCAF representatives to make the elementary suggestion 'that each input to AFUS contain a due proportion of RCAF personnel.' Such a common-sense approach had not previously been followed since 'as far as was possible those who had been at the PRC longest were posted to AFUS irrespective of nationality.'⁵⁷

The chief result of Breadner's pacifying mission came in the form of a letter from Sir Bertine Sutton to all AOsc-in-C and AOsc on the subject of Canadianization. According to the AMP, 'it was felt that all concerned should be reminded once again of the views of both Services which are in complete agreement on this subject.'

Canada is a Dominion and as such is no less entitled to a separate and autonomous Air Force than is the United Kingdom. This right she has temporarily surrendered in the interests of war efficiency, accepting the fact that unity of organization and of operational command is essential in the prosecution of total war.

The recognition by Canada of this need for unity has, however, placed upon us the responsibility of maintaining and encouraging the *esprit de corps* of that part of the RCAF which became part of the Imperial Air Forces in the United Kingdom ...

The object of this letter is, therefore, to urge upon you once again the importance of sparing no effort to implement the formation of the Canadian Squadrons and the crewing together of RCAF personnel, and to ask you to encourage in any way you can the sense of *esprit de corps* in the Royal Canadian Air Force. It will make for greater efficiency amongst its members during the war and will help Canada in the post-war period to form as a separate Service, the forces which have done so well in the present war.⁵⁸

As C.P. Stacey observed in *Arms, Men and Governments, The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945*, Sutton's missive amounted to a 'frank and rather hard-favoured statement of what the Royal Canadian Air Force had lost by the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan ... A situation where the Air Ministry was calling upon RAF Commands to foster the *esprit de corps* of the RCAF, and was indulgently acknowledging "the right of the RCAF to some form of self-expression" was not a satisfactory one from a national point of view.' He also suggested, however, that Sutton's recognition of Canada's fundamental entitlements represented a 'considerable and one might say final success for ... Canadianization ... which from this time onward met few of the obstacles that had hindered its progress hitherto.' The more accommodating British attitude, he added, was materially influenced by Ottawa's decision, on 22 January 1943, to pay the full cost of the RCAF Overseas – a step which solved 'the contradiction between the manly policy of independence which Canada was trying to follow in respect of the RCAF Overseas and the idea of allowing Great Britain to pay most of the bill.' Now, however, with Ottawa responsible for financing,

'the whole Canadian position of Canadianization – both moral and practical – was ... vastly strengthened.'⁵⁹

In fact, it would take a full year before the obstacles began to fall. Despite a near doubling of the number of RCAF aircrew serving overseas in 1943 from 11,790 to 21,540, that year the overall Canadianization rate actually decreased from 68.1 per cent in January to 66.8 per cent in December; as can be seen from table 2, it was only in 1944 that great strides were made and the figure reached 85.2 per cent.⁶⁰

Furthermore, the links between the Air Ministry's more open attitude and Canada's assumption of financial responsibility for the RCAF Overseas appear tenuous at best – if, indeed, they existed at all. The Canadian government had taken that decision not to gain leverage over the Air Ministry, but as a book-keeping exercise designed to 'have the effect of increasing our expenditure in sterling in the United Kingdom, thereby providing indirectly additional Canadian dollars to Britain to assist her in purchasing supplies required from Canada.' And when Edwards was informed of the fact, several days after he had sent his harshly critical letter to the Air Ministry, he was warned not to draw inappropriate conclusions. We feel 'Air Ministry may mistrust our reasons for suddenly wanting to pay our share,' Breadner explained, 'and therefore consider that any pressure for control other than is necessary for effective working of pay arrangements may be viewed with suspicion and for that reason be ill-timed.' Edwards agreed, replying that he 'would certainly have avoided this angle if I had known that you were pursuing the suggestion I put forward months ago.'⁶¹

It was nevertheless tempting for the staff at Overseas Headquarters to read between the lines, and, anticipating that the new financial arrangements would necessitate the drafting of a revised text governing the status of the RCAF Overseas, the directors of air staff and personnel, Group Captains H.A. Campbell and F.G. Wait, hoped, among other things, that Edwards would 'have more say in the operational equipment to be used by our Squadrons. The present provision of obsolescent equipment for RCAF Squadrons is beginning to have an adverse effect on the morale of the RCAF, and to produce a lack of desire on the part of RCAF personnel to serve in Canadian units.'⁶²

Any perception that RCAF squadrons did not 'get the good aircraft' threatened Canadianization, and Edwards turned to the Air Ministry for help in squelching the rumour. But because seniority played a part in determining when squadrons would receive new equipment, and since there were differences between types (that the Halifax loss rate was higher than the Lancaster's in 1943 could not be hidden), invidious comparisons based on the experience of just a few squadrons could always be drawn and then generalized upon. Power himself told Edwards in April 1943 that he would soon embark on a drive to secure better aircraft for Canadian squadrons – a drive which, in fact, never materialized.⁶³

As we shall see later in this volume, allegations of widespread discrimination against RCAF squadrons in the matter of equipment do not stand close scrutiny. But perceptions can be as important as reality in shaping attitudes,

and there is no denying the fact that many Canadian aircrew believed that their squadrons had been unfairly treated and that ill-feeling developed as a result. Thirty years later, in a statement reflecting his general frustration with the RAF's treatment of the RCAF, Curtis (who had left London in December 1943) still recalled that 'the thing that constantly amazed me was the manner in which the British would allocate new aircraft to all of their squadrons first before Canada could receive any' – a recollection which was at best an imperfect rendering of reality.⁶⁴

If the issue of aircraft allocations was a complex one, commissioning should have been very straightforward. The 1942 Ottawa agreement had stipulated unequivocally that all RCAF pilots, navigators, and air bombers who met the appropriate Canadian standards would be commissioned, regardless of the 50 per cent limit imposed in 1939. Yet, in November 1942, Power was surprised to learn that only 28.7 per cent of RCAF pilots and observers overseas were, in fact, commissioned. With commissions in the field still subject to Air Ministry approval^{*} and the RCAF automatically promoting 25 per cent of its pilots and observers on graduation from the BCATP, those figures meant that the RAF was commissioning fewer than 4 per cent of Canadians. That reluctance did not extend to its own aircrew, however, as on 1 September 1942 57 per cent of RAF pilots and observers were officers. The discrepancy was even greater in the case of pilots, as 67 per cent of those wearing RAF uniforms held commissions compared with only 29 per cent in the RCAF.⁶⁵

According to the Air Ministry, part of the problem was 'that Commanding Officers of some Royal Air Force units may be reluctant to recommend a Royal Canadian Air Force airman for a commission, though considered suitable, because he is junior to a Royal Air Force airman who is not considered suitable and therefore not recommended.'⁶⁶ However, it was Overseas Headquarters' belief that the impression among RAF officers 'that politics played an important part' in Canada's desire for more commissions had 'created a mild antagonism amongst CO's and, in some cases, resulted in adverse recommendations insofar as our personnel were concerned.'⁶⁷

While these difficulties did not trouble Whitehall, Power was anxious to accelerate the Air Ministry's commissioning process which, given the 2059 Canadian aircrew officers overseas in August 1942, was 1978 commissions short of even the old 50 per cent standard. Aware that the Canadian press fully supported commissioning all aircrew, he advised the British high commissioner in early January 1943 that, if the Air Ministry did not take action to grant commissions to the percentages agreed upon in 1939, 'the RCAF would commission the shortage themselves using as recommendations for commissioning those ... that had been made when these airmen graduated from training schools in Canada.'⁶⁸

* Not until February 1944 did the RCAF win the right to commission any and all aircrew serving overseas without reference to the Air Ministry; but the latter required that for Canadians in RAF squadrons this could occur only on completion of their operational tour and that they must then be transferred to RCAF squadrons or repatriated to Canada.

His warning had little effect. On 12 February 1943 the EATS Committee (which included Balfour, Sutton, and Sir Christopher Courtney, the RAF's air member for supply and organization) decided to tell Power, 'more in sorrow than in anger, that while we accepted the right of the Canadian authorities to set their own commissioning standards, we proposed to maintain our existing standards' for fear of the adverse effect 'a general lowering of the standards of leadership and other officer-like qualities' would have on operational efficiency. The committee's position reflected the strong opposition of both Sutton and Courtney to any wider granting of commissions, and was taken in spite of Bomber Command's desire, as a minimum, to commission all pilots and navigators of heavy-bomber crews. It also flew in the face of the committee's previous insistence that operational efficiency could only be determined by the commander on the spot, for in this instance it was decided that operational efficiency was best defined by Whitehall.⁶⁹

In the end, Ottawa and London simply agreed to disagree, Canada circumventing the RAF's reluctance to commission Canadians in the field by the simple expedient of commissioning a larger number of BCATP graduates.⁷⁰ By these methods the percentage of commissioned RCAF pilots, navigators, and bomb-aimers serving overseas increased from 28.7 per cent in August 1942 to 52.2 per cent a year later (compared with 54.3 per cent of RAF aircrew in the same categories) and to 74.3 per cent by August 1944 (63.4 per cent in the RAF). Among RCAF wireless operators and air gunners, the percentage of officers increased from 8.6 per cent in August 1942 (11.1 per cent in the RAF) to 15.5 per cent in August 1943 (14.8 per cent in the RAF) and to 25.7 per cent by August 1944 (25.8 per cent in the RAF).⁷¹

The RAF's reluctance to commission RCAF aircrew may well have reflected wider British doubts about the leadership qualities of Canadian airmen – an attitude Curtis encountered in May 1943 while on tour in the Middle East. During a stopover in Gibraltar, Curtis 'struck up with the Under Secretary for Air. We discussed Canadians and he told me that Broadhurst [commander of the Desert Air Force] said Canadians make good flyers but they're not good leaders. I disagreed and said that Canadians were on par with the RAF but Balfour merely repeated Broadhurst's observation. We left it at that but I was annoyed as hell about it' – and he was certain 'that an RCAF officer will have little opportunity to command.'⁷²

Similar attitudes also hampered Overseas Headquarters' efforts to place senior RCAF officers in RAF units and formations to gain operational and staff experience. Curtis later recalled a British 'refusal to post a Canadian group captain to an anti-submarine formation on the grounds that such appointments were reserved for wing commanders who had finished a tour of duty and were due for promotion; not even one exception could be made.'⁷³ And when H.A.

* Group Captain Martin Costello was eventually posted to command Castle Archdale in October 1943. Only one RCAF officer, Group Captain C.R. Dunlop who had commanded No 331 (RCAF) Wing in North Africa during the summer and fall of 1943, was ever appointed to command an RAF Wing – No 139 Wing of 2 Group, Second Tactical Air Force, from November 1943 until January 1945.

Campbell left Overseas Headquarters for the Middle East in the summer of 1943, to gain operational experience with a British formation, he was 'kept supernumerary for months with no duties or responsibilities' until injured when his jeep struck a mine and he had to be repatriated to Canada.⁷³

Following the formation of No 6 Group in January 1943, the RCAF's main concerns over Canadianization were focused on meeting the large aircrew intake of its bomber squadrons. Initially requiring 366 aircrew every four weeks, the formation's expansion to thirteen heavy-bomber squadrons by year's end increased that figure to 588 every four weeks (as compared with only sixty-four for RCAF coastal and seventy-three for RCAF fighter squadrons). As might be expected, Canadianization ratios sometimes fluctuated significantly as No 6 Group squadrons converted to four-engined machines and when casualties were abnormally heavy, but some of the difficulties experienced (particularly in Coastal and Bomber Commands) were directly attributable to the fact that not all aircrew trades were trained in Canada. The specialist navigators required by the RCAF's five Beaufighter and Mosquito squadrons, for example, had to be selected at Bournemouth and sent on a wireless or radar course in the United Kingdom before being posted to OTUs in Fighter and Coastal Commands, while No 6 Group's RCAF flight engineers (largely remustered groundcrew from overseas squadrons) also received their training in the United Kingdom.⁷⁴

The supply of flight engineers had not been a problem when No 6 Group was formed as, with only three heavy-bomber squadrons on strength, the number of volunteers for training easily met RCAF requirements. Indeed, at that time the flight engineer trade was the most Canadianized of the lot – 74.7 per cent – followed closely by air gunners (70.7 per cent) and well ahead of pilots, navigators, bomb-aimers, and radio operators, none of which had reached 60 per cent. When the remaining squadrons began converting to Halifaxes and Lancasters over the summer and fall of 1943, however, the number of groundcrew volunteering to remuster did not keep pace, and the trade's Canadianization rate fell to 23.4 per cent. To alleviate the situation, the Air Ministry asked Canada to follow the recent RAF example and train sufficient flight engineers to match the BCATP's output in the other bomber trades. Although Canadian-trained flight engineers began to arrive at Bournemouth in increasing numbers by the summer of 1944, the supply never met more than a third of No 6 Group's requirements.⁷⁵

One other aircrew category that presented problems during 1943 was the number of Canadian wireless operators/air gunner (WOAGs) being posted to No 6 Group. While the supply of WOAGs had been well in excess of RCAF requirements throughout most of 1942 (as fewer than 400 of the 2700 WOAGs overseas were needed for RCAF squadrons), by year's end an increasing number of those arriving at Bournemouth had completed an operational training course at one of the four RAF OTUs located in Canada and, as such, were already part of a four-man crew. At the RAF's request, the initial arrangements for these transferred OTUs – three of which trained Hudson or Hampden crew for Coastal Command and the fourth Ventura crews for No 2 Group in Bomber

Command – called for 45 per cent of their pupils to be RAF graduates of the BCATP. Since very few British wireless operators were trained in Canada, only RAF pilots and navigators were fed into the OTU courses and their crews had to be filled by adding two dominion – usually RCAF – wireless operators. Much as the RCAF wanted an OTU capacity established in Canada, at least in part to meet the needs of the Home War Establishment, the prospect of training large numbers of mixed RAF/RCAF crews did not meet Ottawa's overseas objectives even when the agreement was revised, so that 85 per cent of the trainees for the three coastal OTUs would be RCAF.⁷⁶

By agreeing to post greater numbers of RCAF aircrew to the Canadian-based OTUs, Air Force Headquarters had overlooked the fact that these were coastal units whose graduates would be posted to Coastal Command where the RCAF had few squadrons. It was left to Edwards to point out the illogic of the new arrangement.

An agreement was made with the Air Ministry that the two Hudson OTU's located in Canada are to be populated by 85% RCAF, 10% RAAF and 5% RNZAF. Although I fully agree that we should train as many RCAF personnel as possible in the OTU's in Canada, I cannot, for the life of me, see what we are going to do with 85% of the people graduating from the Hudson OTU's. As you know, we have only one Hudson squadron over here, and obviously the majority of the people coming from the Hudson OTU's in Canada will have to be dispersed in Coastal Command amongst RAF squadrons, which is exactly what we are trying to avoid. I appreciate that you will need a few for your own Hudson squadrons, but I don't imagine that the wastage in them is very high.

Our main interest, now, is in the Bomber field, and I think you will agree that we should concentrate on this. Perhaps, if we had been consulted on this point, we could have come to a more sensible arrangement.⁷⁷

Given that the RCAF's predominant need for wireless operators was in Bomber Command, it made sense to divert Canadian WOAGs in the mixed RAF/RCAF crews to No 6 Group. Moreover, that solution would have had little effect on operational efficiency since the obsolescent radio equipment available in the Canadian-based OTUs so reduced the value of the instruction given there that all graduates had to take a second OTU course in the United Kingdom where, in the event, most of the four-man crews were broken up for training on larger aircraft. At Overseas Headquarters' urging, the Air Ministry eventually agreed to divert 'some Hudson and Ventura crews to Bomber Command OTUs feeding Article XV squadrons,' but for most of 1943 over half the RCAF wireless operators arriving at Bournemouth, whether in all-Canadian crews or not, were posted to Coastal Command for service in RAF squadrons.⁷⁸

However, these very specific anomalies do not explain why Canadianization rates for the other bomber trades – pilot, navigator, bomb-aimer, and air gunner – remained so low throughout 1943. At the end of July, for example, only 68 per cent of pilots, navigators, and air bombers and 72 per cent of air gunners in Canadian bomber squadrons were members of the RCAF. Moreover, while No 6 Group received 1211 pilots, navigators, air bombers and air gun-

ners from July to September, only 890 of them, or 73.5 per cent, were RCAF. Yet over the same period, 1044 Canadian aircrew in those categories were posted to RAF squadrons in Bomber Command – clear evidence of an abundant surplus. Even among RCAF wireless operators, only forty-seven of the sixty-six posted to Bomber Command went to RCAF squadrons.⁷⁹

The effects of Bomber Command's relative indifference to Canadianization were most clearly demonstrated in mid-June 1943, when it designated a third OTU to back No 6 Group. Since no plans had been made to feed RCAF aircrew into No 24 OTU before it was switched to support the Canadians, throughout July and August its predominantly RAF graduates were posted to No 6 Group's squadrons. In response to Edwards's complaints, the AMP explained that his staff had been 'willing to withdraw this non-Canadian element from No 6 Group and put it into No 4 Group but Bomber Command and the Air Ministry Organisation and Planning authorities protested so violently that the proposal had to be dropped and it was ultimately agreed with your Headquarters that since these crews were required in No 6 Group to complete ... their expansion they should not be withdrawn.' The lesson having been learned, that mistake was not repeated when No 82 OTU was designated to support the Canadian group in September. Although RCAF aircrew were immediately posted into it, its output did not go to No 6 Group until predominantly Canadian crews began graduating in December.⁸⁰

The demonstrable lack of progress in Canadianizing RCAF squadrons despite an equally obvious surplus of RCAF aircrew convinced Edwards to approach the Air Ministry once again about the situation, but the reply he received differed little from those which Overseas Headquarters had been receiving since early 1942.⁸¹ 'I am sorry to see that you are not satisfied with the progress of Canadianization,' Sutton observed. 'I can only assure you that we are straining every nerve to get the policy implemented in the shortest possible time without adversely effecting the operational effort. I did hope that I had made it clear that it was not a process which would show rapid results and that the progress would be gradual. In the circumstances I do not think that the results are unsatisfactory in view of the many circumstances operating against it.'⁸²

Nonetheless, the formation of a Canadian bomber group, with its supporting array of OTUs and Heavy Conversion Units (HCUs), had finally created a structure that could simplify the Canadianization process – provided Flying Training Command posted RCAF aircrew to No 6 Group's OTUs. And by September 1943 there were signs that that was beginning to happen, as 93 per cent of the pilots, navigators, and air bombers graduating from No 6 Group's three OTUs were RCAF. Less satisfactory progress was made for air gunners and

* Although a report on Canadianization prepared in the fall of 1943 by Group Captain Denton Massey indicated a slight deficiency in air gunners, his calculations were based on supplying eighteen heavy bomber squadrons from 1 January 1943 when the RCAF had only three heavy- and eight medium-bomber squadrons. During the first twenty weeks of 1943, for instance, Massey set the No 6 Group requirements at 1088 air gunners, whereas they actually totalled only 420.

wireless operators; and even though there was an abundant supply of aircrew in all trades except flight engineers during the last three months of 1943, the Canadianization rate in RCAF bomber squadrons improved by a meagre 3 per cent, to 62.6 per cent, by year's end.⁸³

There was still room for improvement; and how things could be improved was pointed out by Group Captain Denton Massey, who (in July) had been assigned by Edwards 'to investigate and report on the present state of Canadianization.' Completing his work in November, Massey identified a single, over-arching complication. *'Postings of aircrew from No 3 (RCAF) PRC right through to HCUS for Bomber Command, or Squadrons for Coastal and Fighter Commands, are completely in the hands of the RAF,'* the RCAF Posting authorities have officially no authority whatsoever in these movements under the authority given to them and conduct only a "watching brief." Any influence which the RCAF posting people exert is merely through the courtesy of those who are in actual authority under the RAF.' The solution, therefore, was to establish a wholly Canadian training chain in the United Kingdom – including four all-important AFUS – with postings 'entirely in the hands of an RCAF Aircrew Posting Branch' so that only Canadian aircrew went to Canadian OTUs. That, he concluded, would ensure 'the success of Canadianization.'⁸⁴

Edwards had appointed Massey to his task and could be expected to support his conclusions. But ill-health ended Edwards's career, and on 1 January 1944 Air Marshal L.S. Breadner, who had long wanted a posting to London, became AOC-in-C Overseas.⁸⁵ The former CAS who, at Power's prompting, had routinely prodded Edwards about the slow pace of Canadianization would, however, quickly revert to the form he had displayed four years before, when strengthening the national identity of the RCAF Overseas had been an incidental concern at best. Massey's eminently sensible conclusion that RCAF control of postings was the best guarantee of Canadianization, for example, he dismissed off-handedly, telling Ottawa on 5 February that the proposal was 'uneconomical due to the fact that they were already being done by the Air Ministry.'⁸⁶ Similarly, when Power asked him to comment on 'suggested amendments to JATP agreement' before his meeting with Balfour to work out how far to reduce the size of the BCATP, Breadner replied that he did 'not recommend discussions on any items therein with Balfour at present time' – confirming his contentment with the Air Ministry's handling of RCAF airmen.⁸⁶

⁸³ On page 299 of *Arms, Men and Governments*, C.P. Stacey quotes the 'Comments of the AOC-in-C' interleaved at the end of the full Massey report as belonging to Edwards. Since these comments disagree with a number of Massey's suggestions and are contrary to both Edwards's repeated statements and the recommendations of his own headquarters staff in December 1943, it seems most unlikely that they were written by the out-going AOC-in-C. Breadner also concluded his 5 February letter to Power with the statement that 'particular comment on the recommendations are interleaved in the full report' as, indeed, they are. There is no similar indication that Edwards ever commented on the report. In fact, the Overseas Headquarters' war diary states that the Massey report was not submitted until 24 January 1944, long after Edwards had returned to Canada. It would appear, therefore, that the comments Stacey attributes to Edwards were almost certainly those of Breadner.

For whatever reason, Power did not seek to gain Canadian control over postings when he sat down with Balfour; but the atmosphere of their talks, the latter reported, 'though charming personally,' was nevertheless 'grim and extremely nationalistic officially.' The 'trend of Canadian thought ... is hardening towards much greater control of personnel during remainder of war with Germany, and undoubtedly leading up to demand for operational responsibility for all Canadian units in second phase of policing of Europe and Japanese conflict ... Most serious claim is firm request to wash out safeguarding words negotiated with difficulty last conference that operational expediency should limit RCAF HQ London's possible activities.'⁸⁷

Power took the position that 'these terms are too indefinite to be workable. They are capable of being put up on any occasion to block the granting of our requests. As the final decision as to operational expediency rests with the RAF, we have not a chance, the shoe should be on the other foot. We should decide the terms and conditions of service of our personnel and have the final say as to where they will serve.'⁸⁸ Although he had 'wished operational expediency decision definitely to be in Canadian hands,' Power finally agreed, 'after long – sometimes heated – discussion,' that 'the final decision as to operational expediency will be a matter for discussion between RCAF and RAF.' Even so, Canada had extended its control over RCAF airmen to the extent that such matters as repatriation, tour lengths, and commissioning were now firmly within Ottawa's purview, and the amended agreement stipulated that RCAF airmen in RAF units were only attached to that service and could be recalled, upon notification, within a two month period – the RAF reserving a similar right for British airmen attached to RCAF units. The length of operational and non-operational tours was also specified, together with a new provision that 'on completion of an operational tour, all RCAF personnel will be placed at the disposal of the AOC-in-C, RCAF Overseas' who would, in consultation with the commander-in-chief concerned, 'place at the disposal of the RAF such personnel as are required for instructional duties' in the same proportion as the ninety-odd squadrons worth of RCAF aircrew 'in front-line squadrons.' Finally, the agreement also set up a Joint Demobilization Committee to oversee the prompt demobilization of RCAF personnel serving in RAF units.⁸⁹

As important as these developments were for the overseas air force, the Canadianization process received its biggest boost – and the British attitude towards the Canadian service its greatest shock – as discussion turned to the RCAF's role in the war's 'second phase,' following the defeat of Germany, when a few Canadian squadrons would be part of the occupying force in Europe, but most would be formed into 'a fully integrated Canadian Air Force available for service wherever the Canadian government may decide.' To carry out that policy, 'RCAF personnel, who are presently attached to the RAF, will at once become effectively and unconditionally at the disposal of the Canadian government.'⁹⁰ With that statement, presented to Harold Balfour in an aide-memoire dated 10 February, Ottawa made it clear that the lingering effects of Article XIV of the original 1939 BCATP agreement, which had placed Canadian aircrew 'at the disposal of the Government of the United Kingdom,' would end

with the defeat of Germany and that the RCAF would once again become an autonomous air force – albeit with a surplus of personnel and a shortage of formed units.

Having hoped to use Canadian aircrew to flesh out the RAF's own 'stage two' commitment, the Air Ministry was perturbed by Canada's determination to field an 'independent ... force' in the war against Japan, in part because 'it went considerably beyond what the Air Staff had hitherto had in mind.' But it was recognized that 'in principle RCAF autonomy in the second phase was difficult to resist,' and in the end Whitehall had to accept that Air Ministry control of Canadian airmen – even those in RAF squadrons – was coming to an end.⁹¹ Each command was duly informed that 'for the Japanese war there would be "a fully integrated Canadian Air Force available for service wherever the Canadian Government may decide,"' and for that reason, 'after the conclusion of hostilities with Germany, all Royal Canadian Air Force personnel shall be unconditionally at their disposal.'

The present requests of the Canadian Government represent one more step in a logical progress towards the formation of a fully integrated Canadian Air Force. The number of Royal Canadian Air Force units is now such that the United Kingdom Government cannot but recognise – and has recognised – the soundness of the Canadian case, made as it is by a self-governing Dominion on behalf of its own nationals ...

The [Air] Council appreciate that there may be administrative difficulties in putting the revised arrangements into practice, but they are confident of your full support in overcoming the difficulties and implementing the inter-Governmental agreements. Every effort must be made by all concerned to give prompt and careful attention to the instructions which will be issued and to observe them both in the letter and in the spirit. This is all the more important since the Canadian Government have represented that, in their view, there have been instances in the past of unreasonable delay in the application of agreed arrangements. No doubt there have been genuine misunderstandings, but no shadow of misunderstanding must be allowed to occur in the future which could possibly impair the excellent relations which have been established between the two Forces or the close ties subsisting between the two Governments and peoples.⁹²

The new attitude gave a final impetus to the Canadianization of the Article XV squadrons and a new term for the process – 'unscrambling.' Since RCAF aircrew would not be available to reinforce the RAF during the Japanese war, at long last the British had a positive incentive to Canadianize RCAF units if for no other reason than to reduce the number of Canadian airmen that would have to be 'unscrambled' from RAF units at the end of the war in Europe.⁹³ After making little or no progress for nearly two years, Canadianization now flourished. From a mere 66.8 per cent in December 1943, the Canadian aircrew content of RCAF squadrons jumped to 77.1 per cent by June 1944 and to 85.2 per cent by year's end. On 31 March 1945, as the war in Europe was rapidly drawing to a close, the Canadianization ratio reached 88.2 per cent.

By early 1944, however, the RCAF was looking well beyond the question of Canadianizing its forty-four Article XV squadrons and, with an eye on Pacific commitments, sought to concentrate Canadian aircrew surplus to their requirements in a relatively small number of 'nominated' RAF units. Having first been raised by J.L. Ralston as far back as 1940 and reaffirmed, albeit vaguely, by the 1942 Ottawa air training agreement, this was not a new idea; but it was not until the summer of 1943 that arrangements had been made to select ninety-three RAF squadrons for the surplus Canadian aircrew, and only after Power and Balfour sat down in February 1944 that specific posting instructions were issued to most RAF commands.⁹⁴

The idea was never popular in London, the Air Ministry's director general of organization (DGO) having told Fighter Command at the end of August 1943 that 'this is a political move which has been forced on us by the Dominion governments. We realize how irksome it will be from everyone's point of view, but it will have to be faced. These "nominated" squadrons will be ordinary RAF squadrons in every sense of the word and there will be no difference between them and any other RAF squadrons in any way whatsoever ... DG of P's immediate aim will be to have prepared 30 to 40 per cent Canadian crews in each "nominated" squadron.'⁹⁵

The proposal also lacked a certain precision. Aware, perhaps, that the RCAF could fill about ninety squadrons in total with Canadian aircrew – including the forty-four Article XV squadrons – Edwards had wondered whether 'we have taken on too many' when ninety-three were chosen for nomination. For the result, if Canadian aircrew were distributed equally among them, would be precisely as the DGO forecast – each would be somewhat less than half RCAF. Indeed, when Power and Balfour met in February 1944 the lack of clarity resulted in considerable confusion. Having just worked out a scaling-down of the BCATP to the point where it would support a total of ninety-three RCAF squadrons – and declaring, at the same time, that ninety-three squadrons would likely represent Canada's air force commitment to the war's second phase – for some time the Canadian minister could not decide whether the ninety-three 'nominated' squadrons actually included the forty-four RCAF units already overseas, or whether the ninety-three were entirely in addition to the Canada's Article XV establishment, giving a grand total of 137. On the other hand, he was not at all confused about the ultimate goal of nomination – that the squadrons should be as Canadianized as possible and ideally '100 per cent RCAF.' Although that was clearly impossible if 137 squadrons had to be considered, at the end of the day it was decided that there would be ninety-three nominated squadrons after all, but forty-nine would have first call on Canadian surplus aircrew and Power hoped that they, at least, would be 100 per cent Canadian.⁹⁶

The Air Ministry would not make any such promise, and contrary to an initial undertaking by Balfour allowed only that '100 per cent, or as near as possible, of the output of RCAF aircrews should go to Article XV and RAF nominated squadrons.' Moreover, there is clear evidence that key players in the Air Ministry wanted to avoid a situation in which nominated RAF squadrons

became so Canadianized that, for example, they could lay claim to an RCAF commanding officer.⁹⁷

In Coastal Command, where the process of Canadianization had often been lethargic, the fact that Whitehall was now the problem was obvious to the RCAF staff officer.

Advice with respect to this policy was received by Coastal Command from Air Ministry in the first instance in November 1943. The Command promptly submitted recommendations for nominated squadrons ... No one at the Command protested the policy in any way. It was accepted calmly.

In May 1944, the Command was asked by Air Ministry to select among the list of nominated squadrons, three squadrons for priority nomination. This was promptly done and again without advancing any protest.

Now it appears that someone at Air Ministry (probably Air Council level) has 'invited' this Command to send in an objection to the policy and to urge that RCAF aircrew personnel be not allowed to infiltrate any particular RAF squadron beyond 50% of its strength.

Air Ministry officials advised senior officers of Coastal Command that although as a result of Captain Balfour's talks in Canada, it was the intention to man these nominated squadrons to 100% RCAF aircrew, after Captain Balfour's return it was pointed out to him by the RAF that it was not considered desirable from the disciplinary and other points of view that aircrew should be 100% Canadian and the remaining personnel Royal Air Force. In other words, these RAF folk are attempting to block a policy that would result in some RAF ground personnel in these units coming under the command of general list officers of the RCAF. On the other hand, they find it difficult to understand the dissatisfaction of the RCAF with the present situation and the alternative which spreads such large numbers of RCAF aircrew surplus to the requirements of RCAF units into so many units that these aircrew must always be in a minority and under the command of RAF officers.⁹⁸

Here was reason for Breadner to protest, but under his leadership Overseas Headquarters rarely stirred in order to defend Canadian policy. No complaint appears to have been made.

It is not surprising, then, that the degree of concentration of Canadians in nominated squadrons was far less than that which Power had in mind. By 31 March 1945, when the effects of the policy should have been most pronounced, only 2001 of 4524 RCAF aircrew still serving in RAF squadrons had been posted to nominated units, and the Canadian aircrew component approached 45 per cent in only a handful of them. In single-seat squadrons, where concentration should have been easiest, the policy was almost completely ignored, so that three-quarters of the Canadians were actually serving in other than nominated squadrons and only one or two in each of the designated units. Coastal Command's record was also poor, there being little difference between the number of Canadians in nominated and un-nominated units even in Liberator and Halifax squadrons, for which there were sufficient RCAF air-

crew to have fully Canadianized all three that had been nominated. Bomber Command did better in Nos 3 and 4 Groups; but No 1 Group, which had the highest proportion of Canadians outside of No 6 Group, had distributed them evenly, while No 5 Group appears to have been entirely unaware of the policy.⁹⁹

Still, even such an imperfectly implemented policy paid some dividends, at least in theory, when in May 1944 the Air Ministry proposed converting a number of nominated squadrons into RCAF units as a means of persuading Canada to post additional RCAF groundcrew to the United Kingdom. (There was, by now, a serious shortage of manpower in all the British services.) Non-committal at first, Power eventually authorized Breadner to negotiate the transfer of fourteen squadrons in order to meet the RCAF's recently revised 'second phase' contribution of fifty-eight squadrons. Talks were still in their preliminary stage, however, when Canada's second-phase commitments were further curtailed in September.¹⁰⁰ Repatriation fast became Overseas Headquarters' main preoccupation, and by December all personnel not immediately required for further duties overseas were being returned to Canada. As a result, the size of the RCAF Overseas, which had reached a peak strength of 64,382 in October 1944, began a gradual decline even though the number of aircrew in operational squadrons held steady.¹⁰¹

Although still undertaking some 'second-phase' planning in February 1945, Overseas Headquarters became involved in a final Anglo-Canadian policy dispute when the AOC-in-C of Bomber Command moved unilaterally to extend the length of the first operational tour of his bomber crews from thirty to thirty-six sorties. Although Sir Arthur Harris was responding to a looming manpower shortage (caused by cuts in OTU capacity to permit the transfer of RAF ground personnel to the army), his action violated the terms of the Balfour-Power agreement, which required government-to-government consultation before conditions of service could be changed. Typically, however, Breadner said nothing, and it was left to the new minister of national defence for air, Colin Gibson,* to put forward objections which, from Ottawa's perspective, were entirely sensible. How could the public be expected to understand the need to lengthen Bomber Command's operational tour when there was a surplus of trained aircrew in Canada who had been refused operational postings to the United Kingdom?¹⁰²

Aware that they 'had no right to continue to apply the extended tour to RCAF personnel' after Ottawa had refused its permission, the British Air Council issued instructions 'to postpone the introduction of the extended tour of 36 sorties for all RCAF aircrew in Bomber Command'; but Harris failed to do so, arguing the 'we now have the tail wagging the dog' as a 'result of the wholesale "alienisation" of the Royal Air Force.' The matter 'should be brought to a showdown in the highest quarters,' and if the Canadians refused to fall into line their wishes should be ignored. Sir Charles Portal agreed, asking that it be 'made clear to the Canadians that their refusal to come into line with us would

* C.G. Power had resigned from the cabinet in November 1944 over the conscription issue.

mean the reduction of the bomber effort. Their refusal would stand on record for all time.¹⁰³

The question was finally resolved at a meeting between Portal, Harris, and Breadner on 14 March, when the latter explained that he had been authorized by Gibson to agree to a 'points' system similar to the one that had been in effect during the previous summer. This compromise was acceptable to the British officers provided 'the [points] rate would be worked out so as to require crews to do, on an average, about 35 actual sorties' and also allowed Breadner 'to explain to his Government that the adjustments in "points" were made to accord with the changed situation and that although the risk for the crews would be somewhat increased, it would be nothing like what it had been in the worst days when the tour had been fixed at its present level on a sortie basis.' With the fighting on the Continent rapidly drawing to a close, however, the agreed 'points' system was rendered unnecessary before it could be put into effect and, on 15 April, High Wycombe issued instructions reducing first-tour length to thirty sorties by month's end. Even so, Bomber Command calculated that twenty-nine RCAF aircrew had been killed or captured while flying first-tour sorties beyond the thirty limit.¹⁰⁴

The dispute was one of Breadner's last acts as AOC-in-C before being replaced at Overseas Headquarters by Air Marshal G.O. Johnson on 1 April 1945. With the surrender of Germany in May, Johnson's main task was to oversee the repatriation of RCAF personnel and to administer the RCAF's thirteen-squadron contribution to the British Air Forces of Occupation (Germany). Following the disbandment of the last RCAF squadron serving with that force, Overseas Headquarters was itself disbanded on 22 July 1946.¹⁰⁵

Cutting Out a Paper Tiger, 1943-5

'Canada had not an acre of land or property in the Orient,' Prime Minister Mackenzie King told the Cabinet War Committee in October 1944; and apart from the citizens of British Columbia – and perhaps the families of the soldiers lost at Hong Kong nearly three years before – Canadians thought not one whit about the Pacific and the war against Japan.¹

That was not the case in the Department of National Defence, and more particularly in Air Force Headquarters, where the question of what Canada should do in the second phase of the war – the occupation of Germany and carrying the fight to Japan – was widely regarded as an opportunity to right the wrongs of Article XV and the disappointing process of Canadianizing the overseas air force. As far back as November 1943 Power had explained that in the campaign against Japan, Ottawa would have the chance to 'bring our own men into our own squadrons under our own direction' for the final phase of the war.²

And it was to be on a large scale. When King discussed the matter further with his air minister in January 1944, Power had expressed the desire to field sixty or seventy squadrons. The navy, too, might play 'a prominent part,' but the two agreed 'that there was really no place for sending any army over the Pacific.' Even so, the prime minister had doubts about the country's enthusiasm 'about going on with the war with Japan,' and he was surer still that 'we will get little credit for anything we do, either on the part of the US or Great Britain.' Canada would contribute – it always had, and King acknowledged the 'obligation to share with ... the British, Americans and Australians' – but in January 1944 his preference was to do so modestly. For the moment, then, the size and nature of Canada's commitment was less important than letting the British know of Ottawa's determination to decide where, and under whom, Canadians would serve. 'We could not,' Power observed later, 'await the decision of the Air Ministry on whether a given [RAF] squadron containing a number of ... RCAF personnel and stationed in, let us say, Egypt or Burma, would remain there. The future of Canadian boys, I said, must not be dependent on the convenience or interest of the government of any other country.'³

That was the message Power delivered, with the prime minister's approval, to his British counterpart, still Sir Archibald Sinclair, on 18 January 1944.

Besides seeking timely unscrambling and repatriation of Canadian airmen from RAF squadrons – to afford ‘early demobilization’ to those who desired it and to guard against their serving in British units in the second phase – Power addressed the limits of Canada’s commitment to the war in the Far East. Not only would it be measured against ‘our position as a Pacific power,’ membership in the Commonwealth, and proximity to the United States, but, to ensure that it was determined ‘by her desired foreign policy,’ there would be no premature undertaking to place Canadian forces under British control or send them to a theatre of operations (South-east Asia, for example) where British interests prevailed.⁴

Harold Balfour, British parliamentary undersecretary of state for air, encountered the same attitude when he arrived in Ottawa in February to discuss the scaling down of the BCATP. From his perspective, the Canadian minister was ‘grim and extremely nationalistic officially,’ and the talks revealed that Ottawa was ‘hardening towards much greater general control of personnel during remainder of war with Germany, and undoubtedly leading up to demand for operational responsibility for all Canadian Units in second phase of policing of Europe and Japanese conflict.’ Under the circumstances, meeting with Power had been ‘about as much fun as being on the end of a pin.’⁵

Although reductions in the BCATP were geared to meet diminished second-phase requirements, Balfour had never meant to take up the issue of Pacific War commitments with the Canadians. He had little option, however, when Power handed him an aide-memoire outlining the Canadian government’s intentions. Revised by the prime minister and approved by Cabinet, it made abundantly clear that any forces Canada might send to the Pacific would be organized on a strictly national basis, with Canada’s membership in the British Commonwealth being only one of a number of factors which would determine the country’s participation in phase two. There were, indeed, a number of considerations, such as defence of the Pacific Coast and questions of supply and equipment, which ‘may render it advisable for Canada to play her part in the Japanese war in very close co-operation with the United States, at any rate in certain operational areas.’ It was to be understood, therefore, that ‘after the German war is over, RCAF personnel who are presently attached to the RAF will at once become effectively and unconditionally at the disposal of the Canadian Government [and] all RCAF personnel will be regrouped into national units or formations.’⁶

In negotiating the Balfour-Power Agreement, therefore, Ottawa made it clear that air training would be structured in such a way that the country would ‘have at her disposal, after the period of deployment on the termination of the German war, a fully integrated Canadian Air Force available for service wherever the Canadian Government may decide that it can be most usefully employed in the interests of Canada, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations.’ For King, this was ‘the strongest assertion made thus far of Canada’s position as a nation, demanding an equal voice on matters which pertained to her own forces.’⁷

Inevitably, the Canadian plan was not welcomed in London. The process of unscrambling the RCAF from the RAF would 'take some time and involve a certain degree of disorganization in the post-German war period and accordingly ... affect Air Staff decisions and plans which are being made at the present time.' In particular, it would disrupt plans for '... Canadian participation in all theatres during the Japanese phase in domestic, European and South East Asian areas. They had allowed for a considerable strength of 100% Canadian Squadrons which could no doubt, in certain instances, be grouped into small Canadian formations with the RAF organisation; but also, outside these formations, substantial quotas of RCAF personnel in our own squadrons on whom the RAF would be relying to a substantial extent to maintain its strength.'⁸

The air staff realized, however, that they 'were bound to recognise the Canadian Government's right in principle to set up such an objective.' Although accepting that the RCAF would field a 'self-contained and self-supporting' force against Japan, Whitehall nonetheless hoped 'that in the event we shall find that they are prepared to be reasonable in the exercise of the control which they are claiming after the defeat of Germany.' Moreover, Power had assured Balfour 'that there was no question of Canada's not being willing in the post-German phase to place her Air Force under the strategical direction of the Royal Air Force.' Similar assurances were given to Malcolm MacDonald, the British high commissioner in Ottawa: Power preferred to continue on at Britain's side after the defeat of Germany because it was 'in the family. The devil you know rather than the devil you do not.'⁹

What, then, had been the meaning of the aide-memoire handed to Balfour on 10 February? Arnold Heeney, the influential Cabinet secretary, feared that it might be taken as merely another, pro-forma, demand for status 'rather than a warning that the Canadian government intend to have and exercise a real freedom of choice' in deciding both the size of their forces and the theatre in which they would be employed. When the Cabinet met on 22 February to approve the Balfour-Power agreement, Heeney made this case, pointing to the contradiction between the independence demanded on 10 February and the fact that the forty-seven RCAF squadrons allocated to the Pacific were all destined for Air Command, South East Asia. (Out of the phase two total of ninety-three, forty-six would remain in Europe.) The Cabinet secretary got the desired reaction. King said 'forcibly' that ninety-three squadrons were too many, and objected to the very idea of a Southeast Asia commitment – even though 413 Squadron and over 1300 men were already serving in that theatre – when Canada's interests lay in the Pacific, closer to home.¹⁰

The British were subsequently told that Ottawa did not feel committed to the figure of ninety-three raised during the Balfour-Power talks and, for the moment, there would be no commitments on the nature or extent of Canadian participation, either for the war on Japan or for the policing of Europe after Germany's defeat. This was a standard line for a government which, for two decades, had been arguing that hypothetical commitments to future British courses were dangerous and impolitic. Indeed, fearing the thin edge of the wedge in such matters, it was also entirely characteristic of the prime minister

to turn down Power's request in March 1944 to allow a surplus Catalina squadron to be sent to Australia – on the grounds that it was a British effort to get a commitment in that area 'and to follow on with others later.'¹¹ While a prime-ministerial initiative for an independent RCAF force in the Pacific fitted the nationalist pattern King had demonstrated since the original BCATP negotiations in 1939, he was always assiduous in avoiding creeping entanglements.

Not in the least dissuaded by Ottawa's most recent pronouncements, the Air Ministry pressed for more information on Canada's phase two plans and asked Air Marshal L.S. Breadner, recently installed as AOC-in-C, RCAF Overseas, to provide details; but Mackenzie King was reluctant to say anything until the forthcoming prime ministers' conference in London. Nor did the British have, as yet, a strong sense of their own commitment to the Pacific, although the Air Ministry was at least hoping that target establishments would be based 'on the assumption that each participant will be responsible for its own organization and backing of administrative, training and ancillary services.'¹²

As it happened, little was achieved at the political level during the April conference. King played his usual cautious game in the British capital, simply stating that the Canadian parliament must have the final say on any new commitments, and endeavouring to ensure that the meeting's final communiqué conveyed no impression that there was a clear Commonwealth policy on the Japanese war. 'What our plans would be,' said King, 'would depend on how the war developed.'¹³

More definite figures were produced at the service end, even though there was as yet 'no background of agreed higher strategy or of political authority.' The RCAF, for instance, proposed a self-contained force of seventy-two squadrons under the 'direct control of the supreme commander.' There were more than enough aircrew then serving overseas to fill that number. Sixty squadrons – forty-five combat and fifteen transport – would be designated for Southeast Asia or, if it was to become a theatre of operations, to the north Pacific, because it 'would be intolerable to see thousands of US aircraft going through Canada and on to Japan without Canada taking an active part in the air war in this theatre.'¹⁴

Indeed, in negotiations with the RAF during the conference, Breadner suggested that it was 'in the minds of the Canadian Government' to make 'a strong Canadian contribution to south-east Asia organised in RCAF formations with a small contribution of mainly tactical types to the policing of Europe.' He also agreed on a planning figure of fifty-eight Canadian squadrons for phase two, forty-seven of which would go to Southeast Asia (made up of fourteen heavy-bomber, eighteen day-fighter, one night-fighter, one fighter-bomber, one light-bomber, two air/sea rescue, and ten transport squadrons) and eleven to the occupying forces in Europe. Neither Breadner nor the RAF seemed to notice – or know – that the Canadian prime minister had very clearly told his Cabinet in February that he did not want a big commitment to Southeast Asia. They did, however, canvass the possibility of a Canadian contribution to a strategic bomber force against the home islands of Japan. That at least was

closer to Canada, and closer to where Mackenzie King wanted the RCAF to operate.¹⁵

The Breadner planning document returned to Ottawa with King, where it was eventually considered by the Cabinet. While the British were concentrating their efforts in Southeast Asia (Burma, Malaya, Singapore, and the Dutch East Indies), the Canadian politicians felt that 'Canadian and indeed Commonwealth interests might be better served if the Canadian contribution to the war against Japan were made in an "American" theatre, namely the North or West Pacific.' On 14 June the Cabinet tentatively accepted the figure of fifty-eight RCAF squadrons as a basis for planning phase two commitments, but made it clear that the government must have the freedom to choose the operational theatre it thought best. Obviously, the matter had to be discussed at the highest level with their allies.¹⁶

The government immediately contacted, however, was in London, not in Washington. Mackenzie King got in touch with Churchill on 27 June and reiterated his desire for the north Pacific. 'It would clearly be very difficult,' he said, 'to have the major Canadian air effort based, say, on south-east Asia if large United States forces were to operate from Northwest America.' His air minister, meanwhile, instructed Breadner to open discussions with the Air Ministry about a proposal to convert fourteen nominated RAF squadrons (the difference between the fifty-eight squadron figure and the forty-four Article XV squadrons) into complete RCAF units. Power thought the squadrons selected for transfer ought to be overwhelmingly made up of bomber, transport, and fighter types, with the emphasis on the latter. Lone or 'orphan' squadrons – those units that could not easily be grouped into an RCAF formation – were to be eschewed, 'owing to difficulties in administration and supply of aircrew.'¹⁷

Such specific demands – and Canada's preference to serve in the north Pacific – disturbed the British. 'Each dominion,' an Air Ministry official wrote, 'had concentrated on the more attractive roles, and acceptance of their proposals would have left the RAF with a hopelessly unbalanced force.' London therefore asked that the RCAF increase the number of squadron types it was willing to take on and accept some orphans as well. Typically, Breadner pronounced this reasonable, 'not more than our share,' and suggested to Ottawa that Canada had 'no alternative but to accept.' More than that, if the government was going to dispatch the RCAF to act with US forces in the north Pacific, the Air Ministry ought to be informed. The British were planning 265 squadrons for the Japanese war, and were counting Canada's forty-seven among that number.¹⁸

Breadner was no longer in a position to influence policy as easily as he had when CAS. Moreover, Air Vice-Marshal W.A. Curtis was now the air member for air staff at Air Force Headquarters and he effectively argued against the Breadner plan because it did 'not appear to indicate any intention on the part of Air Ministry to form integral RCAF Groups or Formations.' Curtis was prepared to up the ante by only two air/sea rescue squadrons, should there be over-water operations, and one air observation squadron, if the army needed that capability. Power agreed. The RCAF could find forty-seven squadrons of

three types, although the three additional squadrons suggested by Curtis might also be supplied. But forty-seven squadrons of too many types would mean that they would be 'scattered throughout the RAF organization ... We would place ourselves in the unenviable position of having to accede to the requests of the RAF.' If the Air Ministry did not 'see fit to accept this proposal,' the RCAF would send even fewer – thirty-eight squadrons – but again solely of three types: fourteen each of heavy bomber and long-range fighter and ten transport.¹⁹

The aim, as Power put it to Breadner on 25 July, was to have Canada 'provide two or three RCAF Groups under the command of an RCAF Headquarters which, in turn, would function under the operational direction of a supreme commander,' either British or American. Having already recommended the organization of two airfield construction units of about 5000 men each, complete with the requisite engineers and machinery, Breadner hoped that the RCAF would be providing its own maintenance and supply organization as well, which 'would immeasurably increase our independence of the RAF.' Such units were indeed necessary if the RCAF were to field a completely autonomous force in the Pacific, but the Canadian CAS, now Air Marshal Robert Leckie, was uncertain of the air force's ability – or perhaps the government's willingness – to do so. In his opinion, RCAF independence might well be limited, at least initially, to operational units and formation headquarters. 'We cannot expect to achieve the status of a completely independent Air Force quickly,' he explained, 'but rather by a process of growth. If, after we have our headquarters, groups and squadrons formed, we find we still have the energy, money and men to spare, we can take up these other commitments gradually, relieving the RAF as we do so.'²⁰

In August Balfour again met with Power in Ottawa. Not yet having completed their own planning, the British were not keen to have the matter of squadron types to be organized for the Far East discussed at all, but the Canadian minister took the initiative, reiterating his offer of up to forty-seven squadrons of three basic types (unless the RAF would prefer only thirty-eight instead), although he also indicated his willingness to consider forming a wing of three general reconnaissance (GR) squadrons for service against enemy submarines and shipping in the north Pacific. However, if operations from 'North-western America' were prosecuted against Japan, he explained that the bulk of the RCAF would have to operate in this theatre 'for political and other reasons.'²¹

Although Balfour and the vice chief of the air staff, Sir Douglas Evill, were confident that they would eventually 'reach a reasonable arrangement with Breadner over the Canadian contribution,' Power's position was worrying. The RAF had always counted on a significant contribution of RCAF squadrons for a strategic bomber force against Japan, and the withdrawal of a large number for service in the north Pacific would have serious consequences and call for a much increased RAF commitment. The RAF had also tried to allocate a share of the principal strategic roles to each dominion participating in the proposed Far Eastern force, but the RCAF's unwillingness to commit to more than three

basic squadron types would 'react on the pattern of the RAF in that theatre and tend to increase the lack of balance already very noticeable in its projected make up.' The Air Ministry not only wanted additional squadron types, but also more second- and third-line servicing and administrative units behind the RCAF's own squadrons. By the end of August, however, London had conceded the Canadian case on squadron types: the RCAF's contribution would be made up of transport, heavy-bomber, and fighter squadrons only.²²

That still left the question of geography to be resolved. In an aide-memoire prepared for the Canadian government in late July, the British War Cabinet planning staff, while not ruling out service in the north Pacific, had set out their hopes that the RCAF would support the British Army in Southeast Asia and that the heavy bomber squadrons would join the strategic bomber force 'wherever it may be deployed.' Power retorted, through Breadner, that 'the Canadian Government has not changed its attitude and still persists that if hostilities take place in the North Pacific, Canada's principal effort should be in that theatre.' The air minister had his leader's support in this regard, although Mackenzie King was determined not to have as large a force as he was sure Power wanted. King told Cabinet on 31 August that 'Canada's contribution should be one made north of the Equator, as had been the case with our contribution to Europe,' while Power chimed in that this Canadian effort ought to be alongside US forces.²³

On 6 September 1944 Cabinet met for the entire afternoon. Members had before them a chiefs of staff recommendation that Canada ought to be represented in the final assault on Japan as a means of 'avenging Hong Kong, saving face in the East, and restoring Canadian military prestige.' No one disagreed, nor was there apparently any demur from the chiefs' assertion that the north Pacific was of 'particular importance to Canada both geographically and politically.' There was also a consensus that the contribution of the air force ought to be smaller than contemplated, although there would be more questions and inevitable pressure from the defence ministers for larger commitments.²⁴

King returned to the attack a week later. The Cabinet had assembled in Quebec City, where the prime minister was scheduled to host US president Franklin D. Roosevelt and British prime minister Winston Churchill as they and their chiefs of staff met to discuss the higher direction of the war. The prime minister recorded in his diary that the Cabinet was badly divided. Two Nova Scotia ministers, J.L. Ilsley and Angus L. Macdonald, were strong advocates of 'fighting anywhere and making no distinction between the north Pacific and the South Pacific.' Naval minister Macdonald, a resolute opponent of his leader on a broad range of issues, underlined the navy's wish to serve with the British. Ilsley, the minister of finance, added that service in the north Pacific would mean service with the Americans, and that in turn meant costly new equipment and weapons acquisitions. There is no record of other opposition, but clearly the prime minister believed himself under siege. 'I had to do most of the fighting myself to maintain what I would call the only tenable position which means keeping our forces for North and Central Pacific areas.'²⁵

The prime minister also thought that he would have to confront the British directly – Winston Churchill first and then his chiefs of staff – ‘in order that I could explain the political situation and what would be involved in raising an issue in Canada on the question of fighting what would be termed Imperial wars.’ As it turned out, however, Churchill assiduously cultivated King, giving him precisely what was needed to fight the doubters in his own government. The ‘Octagon’ Conference was a thoroughly Anglo-American affair – King having no part in the strategic discussions that focused on the Pacific war – but the gathering provided a forum for Canadian discussions with British and American leaders and in particular for a special meeting of the Canadian Cabinet at the Citadel on 14 September. Churchill was present, and the Canadian and British chiefs of staff joined in later.²⁶

Not yet aware that Churchill would be helpful, King warned his British counterpart that he must keep the political imperative very much to the fore: ‘we were contemplating a general election ... he would understand that our policies would have to be considered in light of the issues that might be fought out on the platform and we wanted to be perfectly sure of our position.’ Churchill understood completely. According to the prime minister, he did not expect Canadians ‘to fight in any tropical region.’ The ‘real position was that the Americans wanted to control the whole war in the Pacific themselves. That the British felt that they must go in and recover possessions in Burma, Singapore etc. That this would be done by the British themselves. That he would not expect us to participate in that area.’ When the chiefs of staff joined in the discussion, Churchill turned dramatically to his chief of the air staff and asked, ‘Why do you put such a heavy burden on the Canadians?’²⁷

For King this was complete vindication. Every argument he had put forward in Cabinet had been sustained. There was no need for service in the south, no need for an air force as large as the RCAF and the RAF were contemplating, and probably no need for a military commitment at all until the last phase of the war against Japan itself, a phase that might be many, many months in the future. ‘Churchill indicated he thought we were generous in our readiness to participate in the Pacific. He made mention of Hong Kong and our feeling perhaps that we would wish to be represented on that account.’ And Roosevelt, with whom King discussed the matter on 14 September, agreed that Canada’s contribution need not be large and need not come ‘for some time.’²⁸

The Quebec Conference accepted in principle that Canadian forces would participate in phase two of the war. The Americans agreed that a Commonwealth fleet should contribute as soon as possible to the US effort in the main theatre of operations against Japan, and that a self-contained Commonwealth force of long-range bombers would be formed to take part in the assault against the Japanese home islands. The British specifically offered forty long-range bomber squadrons, twenty of which would act as aerial tankers, but serious questions remained about the feasibility of refuelling Lancasters and the locations of suitable bases and facilities. Final arrangements were left for the most senior military planners to discuss after Quebec. With the Lancaster’s design a full generation behind that of the Boeing B-29 Superfortress currently

in service with the USAAF in the Pacific theatre – carrying three tons of bombs, the latter had an operational range of 3000 miles, twice that of the Lancaster – it was apparent that the impact of such a Commonwealth force, 'whose presence in the main theatre was judged not to be strategically essential,' would be limited. Nevertheless, a provisional plan was accepted by the joint chiefs of staff on 27 October (subject to suitable bases becoming available) for an Anglo-Canadian bombing force of three groups to participate in the final attack against Japan.²⁹

At the Canadian Cabinet meeting of 14 September, the chief of the British air staff, Sir Charles Portal, indicated that he expected the RCAF contribution to the war against Japan to be eighteen heavy-bomber and fourteen fighter squadrons. Later that day, however, in talks with the Canadian chiefs, Portal added ten transport squadrons, one air/sea rescue and one AOP squadron, making a total of forty-four for the Pacific, while fourteen more would be used in the policing of Europe. Curtis commented that the RAF had accepted 'our ultimatum' and 'decreased the numbers of types as we requested.' Portal, however, had made the fatal tactical error of minimizing his requirements when presenting them to his political audience earlier in the day, giving King ammunition in his effort to reduce the number of RCAF squadrons below the fifty-eight that had been agreed upon that spring. Although Curtis still favoured a major commitment, Leckie explained that he had already been instructed to submit a proposal substantially paring down the earlier demands.³⁰

Less than a week after the Quebec Conference, the CAS submitted a new plan for phase two, and it is perhaps no coincidence that it set forth a new total of thirty-two squadrons, seven for Europe and twenty-five for Japan.³¹ Air Force Headquarters argued that 'the minimum number of heavy bomber squadrons that could be formed into an integral self-contained strategic air force to have reasonable effect on the enemy is considered ... to be ten squadrons ... Therefore, it is proposed that for participation in the war against Japan, the basic RCAF contingent should be ten heavy bombers, eight long-range fighters and seven long-range transport.' It was convenient, even desirable, to continue service alongside the British, the memorandum continued, but experience had shown that the RCAF must never again allow its contribution to be subsumed by a military ally.

From the experience gained in the United Kingdom, it is apparent that, unless the RCAF component is organized as an integral formation, the effort of the Canadians becomes clouded by the activities of the air forces of our larger allies, such as the USAAF and the RAF. This is apparent by the fact that Canadian participation in the air war over Germany never received due recognition until such time as No 6 RCAF Bomber Group was formed and commenced operations as a wholly Canadian component. Therefore, it is considered necessary that our air force, which will operate against Japan, should be organized into a Canadian formation, and it is proposed that the forces detailed above be formed into an RCAF composite group, commanded by a Canadian Air Officer Commanding ...

Therefore, it is proposed that the RCAF composite group come under the operational control of the RAF commander in the field in a similar way that No 6 Group comes under the operational control of Bomber Command. However, the administrative control should be purely Canadian and therefore the RCAF composite group should be directly under a RCAF Headquarters for administration.³²

Leckie also scaled-back Canada's groundcrew requirements and rejected a British request for 25,000 personnel to serve behind RCAF squadrons in the Pacific theatre. 'I have given this most careful thought and consider it out of line. You will appreciate,' he told the minister, 'that these personnel will not be under our immediate command but will be working with similar RAF units and, therefore, we lose all the benefits that we hope to gain from an integrated Air Force.' Instead, the CAS suggested an 'Aerodrome Construction, Maintenance and Defence Unit of 6000, all ranks, complete with aerodrome construction equipment ... self-contained under the direction of a Canadian AOC-in-C.' These 6000 would be part of a group of approximately 15,000, all ranks, who would be used as replacements or in support of combat units to handle matters such as base hospitals and supply depots. This would bring the entire phase two force to just under 33,000 men, costing \$160,591,000 to start and \$331,165,000 annually.³³

The latest proposal was taken to Cabinet on 20 September. It remained on the table, Mackenzie King again making it clear that he wanted token forces only in the Pacific. The government's business, he insisted, was to save the lives of young men. The prime minister then stated that he wanted every member of the Cabinet to express his views, a manoeuvre that had the effect of isolating the service ministers. 'There were only the three defence ministers,' King recalled, 'who said nothing but realized that they were put on the spot.'³⁴

A hard decision on the commitment for phase two was not taken until the end of 1944. On 11 December the Cabinet, with the chiefs of staff present, approved a commitment of eleven squadrons for the occupation of Europe and twenty-two for operations against Japan, and it was now agreed that the RCAF would be employed with the RAF in the Pacific theatre, eliminating the necessity of unwanted expenditures on American equipment. The establishment was set at 23,000, not the 33,000 desired by the air staff.³⁵

The Minister, in his anxiety to obtain War Cabinet approval for the 33 Squadron proposal, agreed to delete the personnel requirements for ancillaries and CMU [Construction and Maintenance Unit] and gave the figure 23,000 as the complement necessary. In addition to this 10,000 reduction to the original estimate, squadron types were changed and our participation altered from 25 and 7 to 22 and 11. I did not agree to the 23,000 figure as representing the bare squadron requirements for the 33 squadrons in the final proposal which was approved by War Cabinet Committee.

I am afraid the 23,000 figure will have to stand for the time being, at least until the Minister for Air is appointed and the opportunity for re-opening with War Cabinet presents itself.³⁶

The new limit on establishment had serious implications. Leckie pointed out that 23,000 were not enough to meet even the bare squadron requirements. Certainly there could be no contribution beyond the designated squadrons themselves – nothing, therefore, in the way of ancillary units, which were so essential to the operation of a group, not even enough for a group headquarters, unless reductions were made elsewhere. Air Vice-Marshal J.A. Sully wrote to Colin Gibson* in January 1945 that such units directly supported the group's activities, and 'since they will come under the RCAF Group Headquarters, it is most desirable that they be Canadian rather than RAF'.³⁷

The government also opted for a different number of squadrons and a different balance in the force for Japan than Leckie had recommended. This was the direct consequence of representations made by the Air Ministry after it received notification of Leckie's thirty-two squadron proposal. 'While we must naturally conform to your Government's decision in these matters,' Air Marshal Evill wrote on 6 October, 'I must frankly admit that it confronts us with certain difficulties in keeping up the necessary front line strength.'

As regards the Far East theatre, I think you are aware that we are planning to deploy a force of about 36 Lancaster Squadrons capable of operating at increased normal range by means of the flight refuelling technique. We have planned that the fighter support for this force shall be long range fighters to act as escorts or support for the strike element of the bombers. It would, therefore, produce a better balance in your force if we retained this same proportion in the RCAF Squadrons. I should like to suggest, therefore, that the RCAF contribution in the Eastern Theatre should consist of 12 HB (potentially 6 Strike and 6 Tanker Squadrons) and 6 Fighter Squadrons, and I see no difficulty in organizing these 18 squadrons as an RCAF formation.³⁸

Evill's reconfiguration won the day. There would be twelve heavy-bomber squadrons, six long-range day-fighters, three transport squadrons, and one air/sea rescue squadron. The Air Ministry accepted the concept of an RCAF formation headquarters to administer Canadian units and hoped that Ottawa would see 'that throughout we have done our best to provide for self-contained Canadian formations. In the active theatre our proposals constitute the RCAF units as a single Canadian task force. In the European theatre they will be Canadian Wings under the appropriate functional Command though with an RCAF HQ on present lines'.³⁹

The twelve bomber and six fighter squadrons would form one of Tiger Force's three groups. It was not expected that these units would be needed for at least three months after the war in Europe had ended, an event projected to take place at the end of June 1945. All the overseas heavy-bomber squadrons were to remain operational. Five fighter squadrons – Nos 401, 402, 403, 438, and 440, in addition to 400 Squadron, then an army cooperation unit – would

* C.G. Power had resigned from Cabinet on 23 November to protest the imposition of conscription for overseas service. Naval minister Macdonald took on the air portfolio until Colin Gibson was appointed acting minister for air on 10 January 1945.

form the fighter element. Transport squadrons would be derived by converting 422 and 423 squadrons (flying boats) and 407 Squadron (general reconnaissance), while 404 Squadron would become the air/sea rescue unit. In making these selections, Breadner attempted to give the oldest squadrons the 'place of honour' for the war that was to come.⁴⁰

Planning for 'Tiger Force,' the name which the RAF had given to the very-long range (VLR) Pacific bomber force, was beginning to take shape by year's end. The first administrative outline for 'Operation Mould' (later changed to 'Operation Tiger') was completed on 23 November 1944, setting out the composition of the force, types of aircraft, training, maintenance organization, lines of communication, planning and intergroup coordination, and manpower requirements. A commander-designate of the force, Air Vice-Marshal Hugh Lloyd, was appointed the same month. The RAF intended to deploy thirty-six heavy-bomber squadrons equipped with Lancasters (and later re-equipped with Avro Lincolns) and would use air refuelling to bomb Japan from as yet undetermined locations in the Pacific. Eighteen fighter squadrons, initially Mustangs, eventually to be de Havilland Hornets, would escort the bombers, and the force would include four long-range transport, one air/sea rescue, and one photo-reconnaissance squadron.⁴¹

The problem of providing ground support for such a force remained unresolved, but Ottawa was not alone in its desire to shift some of that burden onto an ally. The British hoped that much of the infrastructure and logistical support for Tiger Force would be provided by the Americans, although it was a source of concern that so little concrete discussion had taken place with Washington. As Portal wrote on 27 January 1945, 'It is becoming increasingly important to start planning with the Americans for the participation of our VLR Bombing Force in the Pacific war ... We know very little about American plans for the establishment of VLR bases and are conscious of the difficulties ... It is highly desirable that the American agreement in principle to our participation should be translated into firm arrangements for the division of responsibility for the provision of facilities.'⁴²

At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, however, the British learned the full extent of Washington's indifference to supporting a token British contribution to the final attack on Japan. According to the Americans, their resources were fully stretched and Tiger Force would have to be self-supporting 'from tide-water to aircraft.' 'This placed the project on a completely different footing. It meant mounting a large force on a base or bases, whose precise nature was still unknown but which must be built and equipped entirely with British resources over British lines of supply, at a distance of over 14,000 miles from England.' Compounding the problem, it would be a long time before there was an American decision about just where Tiger Force might be based.⁴³

The Canadian government naturally wanted a volunteer force. Yet by early 1945 Overseas Headquarters was arguing the case for simply posting all personnel for phase two. It made sense for some categories – command posi-

tions, certain aircrew, and specialist trades such as Lancaster radar mechanics – to be assigned, and the policy would be equitable only if it was applied to all personnel. In addition, it would 'simplify enormously the work of repatriation and manning.' Air Force Headquarters agreed, although individual needs and aspirations would be taken into account whenever practicable, and there would be the right to appeal any decision. There would also be an emphasis on men who had not served overseas or not completed a tour of duty. The Cabinet wisely decided, however, that the force to be employed against Japan would be chosen only from those who elected to serve. The prime minister announced the decision to Parliament on 4 April 1945. Any whiff of conscription, he thought, 'would be just suicidal and absolutely wrong.'⁴⁴

It was also agreed that squadrons ought to be returned to Canada for reforming and re-equipping. Leckie was originally of the view that Canadians ought to remain in Britain for reasons of convenience and continuity, but by January 1945 he was arguing that there were 'strong reasons from the point of view of morale why the formation and training of the RCAF VLR group should be carried out in Canada.' By then Overseas Headquarters had surveyed 'many of our personnel,' and warned that 'they all affirm that they will not volunteer unless first given leave in Canada.' King's 4 April announcement to parliament regarding conscription confirmed that no one serving in Europe would proceed to the Pacific without volunteering, getting the opportunity to come home, and having thirty days disembarkation leave. This arrangement had the added advantage that the Pacific route could be used for shipping the Canadian component of Tiger Force to the Far East, relieving pressure on the much-used Middle East route. 'If one of the objects of mounting the VLR force is that it should be a self-sufficient RCAF Task Force,' Overseas Headquarters affirmed, 'then it must obtain this self-sufficiency during the build-up and this can only be done in Canada.'⁴⁵

The availability of personnel for airfield construction was rapidly moving towards the centre of the Air Ministry's preoccupations. The RCAF's construction and maintenance unit, however, had been one of the cuts made to the thirty-three squadron proposal before it had been taken to Cabinet at the end of 1944. A month later the Air Ministry, casting around for 15,000 men to build aerodromes, approached the RCAF to enquire if the Canadians 'could not go even further' than the promised squadrons. Leckie replied that the decision was the government's, but a construction and maintenance unit would have to be 'in lieu of, and not in addition to, some portion of the Force already agreed upon.' In short, the 23,000 ceiling would stand.⁴⁶

Other RCAF officers remained wary of the ceiling's effect, however. In the opinion of Sully, it was 'considered most important that the RCAF Group have two labour constructional units which will be large enough to ensure that the Canadian force may be as self-sufficient as possible.' The view of the RAF that was conveyed to Canada, indeed, was that the whole question of US acceptance of Tiger Force 'would stand or fall by whether we showed ourselves genuinely willing to provide all we could by way of supporting, ie., constructional, manpower.' The British calculated in mid-February 1945 that

they would need 30,000 of these workers and they looked to Canada to supply a significant proportion.⁴⁷

The RCAF could therefore be expected to return to the charge. When the United States Army Air Force requested information on 7 February about the provision of works construction units, they were told that Leckie was making 'tentative enquiries to reactions in Canada' to the provision of one or two Construction Wings that would have to be formed as units. On 28 February the RCAF was once again before Cabinet asking for 6000 construction personnel and other additions to the force. At the time of the 'Octagon' Conference at Quebec, it was explained, planning had been based on the understanding that the US would make available operational airfields in the Pacific. The Americans, however, were not in a position to do this, and the Anglo-Canadians would have to provide services for themselves. This raised the question whether the number of RCAF squadrons ought to be reduced to allow for the necessary support personnel within the agreed limit of 23,000, or whether the Canadian commitment should be expanded to 40,000 in order to include supply, construction, and ancillary units 'which would permit of their organization as a fully integrated and independent group within the British force.' The politicians did not budge: 23,000 it would have to be, although the air staff was instructed to examine carefully the 'new circumstances' and what they meant for 'an appropriate Canadian contingent to the Pacific.'⁴⁸

The commander of Tiger Force was in Ottawa at the time pressing the case for construction personnel. Lloyd let it be known that he needed 10,000 Canadian engineers, even if that meant fewer squadrons. The Americans had made it clear to him that the British 'would have to pay our full "entrance fee" in the construction of airfields. There was no question of doing it "on the cheap."' Nor was there any question of assistance from the USAAF. The British would have to think in terms of a location, perhaps in the Philippines, 'where we could go in and support ourselves in every respect.' Leckie was again sympathetic, telling Lloyd that 'Canada should make a handsome effort in constructing airfields on the basis that it would be far better to deploy six Squadrons by the end of this year than to deploy none this year but ten Squadrons midway through next year.'⁴⁹

Despite the Cabinet's decision to maintain the 23,000 ceiling, air force planners continued to favour a more substantial contingent. With an increase in phase two personnel, they argued, it would be possible to concoct a force of twelve bomber and six fighter squadrons, along with one air/sea rescue squadron, supported by administrative, medical, signals, logistics, and aerodrome defence personnel as well as a 6000-strong construction unit. These 32,709 men comprised 'the smallest unit which the RCAF might reasonably expect to man and still be given control as a purely RCAF force.' The alternative was to place the Canadian contingent at the disposal of the Air Ministry for use in whatever capacity would best assist the RAF, and thus to concede that RCAF independence was lost – exactly the situation that had beset the service through four years of European war and caused such endless hassling between Ottawa and Whitehall. After considering these