A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE: THE LEGACIES OF THE BRITISH COMMONWEALTH AIR TRAINING PLAN IN CANADA'S PRAIRIE PROVINCES

by

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ABSTRACT

The establishment of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) saw the creation of more than one hundred air training schools across the country. In the West, the wide-open spaces facilitated many of these sites, and a sophisticated network of airfields sprang up across the prairies almost overnight. The substantial and enduring impact of the BCATP's airfields and schools in the Canadian West is curiously overlooked by historians, who (for the most part) often focus on the Plan's overall operation at the expense of its lasting influence.

The construction of the BCATP sites prompted extensive modernisation of the existing infrastructure in many of the small communities selected for schools. Moreover, the vast sums of money poured into the region and the tens of thousands of Commonwealth airmen who came to train at the airfields had a significant and long-term cultural and economic impact on the region.

Along with improved infrastructure, the BCATP brought a new cosmopolitanism and a strong regional affinity for the Air Force. More importantly, the Plan influenced the perceptions and perceived roles of women in the prairies and has had an enduring effect on the Canadian women's movement.

In the postwar years, the demographics of the prairies shifted as thousands of BCATP alumni returned to take-up residence in the region they had trained in, while at the same time Canadian war brides departed to be with their new husbands abroad. Industry was transformed as well, as civil aviation took up the legacy of the BCATP and opened up the North while at the same time establishing air transport connections among the prairie provinces, the rest of the nation and the world—connections which contributed to the rapid urbanization, economic growth and cultural evolution of the region.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

2 CFFTS	2 Canadian Forces Flying Training School
419 TFTS	419 Tactical Fighter Training Squadron
BCATP	British Commonwealth Air Training Plan
CDN	Canadian Airlines International
CP Air	Canadian Pacific Airlines
CPR	Canadian Pacific Railway
CNR	Canadian National Railway
CWAAF	Canadian Women's Auxiliary Air Force
DEW	Distant Early Warning (Line)
DWB	Directorate of Works and Buildings
EFTS	Elementary Flying Training School
ITS	Initial Training School
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OTU	Operational Training Unit
PWA	Pacific Western Airlines
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
RCAF (WD)	Royal Canadian Air Force (Women's Division)
RNZAF	Royal New Zealand Air Force
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
SFTS	Service Flying Training School
TCA	Trans Canada Airlines
WRCNS	Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service

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Things are not written without a lot of help. Regardless of the effort put into researching, writing and editing, a writer is surrounded by a support network of friends and experts who make the work so much easier.

First, I must thank my thesis advisor Professor David Breen. Without his cool approach to the project and the bureaucracy that slowed my work, this thesis would not exist. Additionally, his personal wisdom and patient encouragement have made many of the worries and difficulties of its writing bearable.

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As a visual person, the map of the BCATP sites across the prairies was very important to me. Eric Leinberger at UBC Geography created the computer template that allowed me to plot the sites across the region and so provide a visual element to my ideas.

Many have commented that Graduate Studies is an alienating experience. I can happily say this was not my experience. Through my studies I have encountered many of the finest people I will ever meet, and have spent much time discussing theses, commiserating over ideas that did not work and celebrating successes. Monica, Danielle, Patricia, Phil, Darcy and many others have happily made my thesis feel at times like a team project, and always made me feel supported.

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For Christine.

Without your many words of reason and encouragement
I could not have come this far . . .

"Why don't you?"

On the morning of September 1, 1939, German forces smashed into Poland launching the European phase of what was to become the Second World War. Coming to the aid of their beleaguered ally, Britain and France declared war against the German *Reich* two days later, and on September 17, the Soviet Union heaved its army into action and attacked Poland from the east bringing the last of the European giants into the largest and most destructive war the world has yet known. With the great European powers at war in the west, and the empire of Japan at war with China in the east, the September 10 declaration of war against Germany by the Dominion of Canada went largely unnoticed outside of Canadian newspapers.

As a junior power, Canada's entrance into the war may have been considered less than daunting to the Axis powers; however, by war's end, Canada's exceptional contributions, both in military power and materiel were unmistakably vital to the Allied victory. Among the Dominion's considerable contributions were the organization and operation of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, a massive training scheme designed to prepare the thousands of commonwealth aircrews necessary for the air war in Europe.[1]

Established in 1939, the BCATP was a program which spanned the geographical breadth of Canada, but which had its most significant impact on the three prairie provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. With almost half as many bases located in these three provinces as in the rest of the Dominion, the BCATP brought enormous sums of cash, improved infrastructure, modern technology and legions of people to the agricultural heartland of the country. The Plan sparked an instant process of recovery and modernization in a region suffering from the effects of the worst global economic depression in history, the fallout from a dreadful ecological

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[1] Although primarily designed for the air forces of the Commonwealth nations, the BCATP also hosted a number of "foreign" militaries, among which were the Norwegian aircrews at 'Little Norway' in Toronto, and the Free French Air Force, whose pilot trainees were absorbed into the RAF quotas at schools across Canada. W.A.B. Douglas. *The Creation of a National Air Force: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force.* Vol. 2. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1986. p. 236.

catastrophe and the continuing perception of marginalization at the hands of eastern Canadian politicians and business executives. The scale of the Plan was audacious, perhaps challenged only by the immensity of the financial and agricultural collapse of the prairies that it would so greatly help to alleviate.

The prairies at the inception of the BCATP were an economically devastated and market-remote region. Isolated from much of the industry and commerce of central and eastern Canada, and with the last census before the war finding sixty-four percent of the prairie population living outside of urban centres and largely employed in agriculture, the region was a rural island far removed from central Canada's industrialized bustle.[2] In addition, at the outbreak of war in the fall of 1939, Canada as a whole was still struggling under the brutal grip of the Great Depression. Within the Dominion, the region worst hit by the depression was the prairie west, where economic hardship had been coupled with the devastating environmental disaster of the 1930's drought, which turned the prairie wheat-belt into a dust bowl.

By 1933, a decrease in net income from agriculture (resulting from international embargoes characteristic of national protectionist responses to the depression) was an astonishing ninety-four percent, and the price of a bushel of wheat had dropped from $1.00 in the last years of the 1920's to .46¢ in the first half of the 1930's.[3] Coupled with these bleak income statistics was the equally appalling reduction in crop yields due to drought. In the 1920's, the average seeded prairie acre produced seventeen bushels of wheat. Between 1933 and 1937, those same seeded acres were barely able to produce nine-and-a-half bushels.[4] The production of scarcely half the 1920's crop yields, coupled with price reductions in excess of fifty percent saw the economy of the prairies battered far worse than any other Canadian region, and by 1937, two

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[2] *Census of the Canadian Prairies, 1936: Population and Agriculture*. Vol. 1. Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics. 1938. pp. 40, 442, 906.

[3] Canada, Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations. *Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations*. Vol. 1. Ottawa: E. Cloutier, Queen's Printer, 1940. p. 150., and Gerald Friesen. *The Canadian Prairies: A History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984. p. 388.

[4] Friesen. *The Canadian Prairies. Op. Cit.*, pp. 387-388.

thirds of the farm population of the prairies were destitute.[5]

The desperate response to the economic and agricultural calamity of the 1930's was for many men to leave the region in vain attempts to find work in other parts of the country, or to submit to what amounted to internment in federal labour camps. The result of these sad efforts, combined with the depression's economic devastation and lingering drought, was a partially depopulated region that continued to suffer long after economic revival had begun in the other provinces.

In a region as economically distressed as the Canadian prairies, the massive scale of the BCATP represented vitally needed jobs for everyone, money and, most importantly, an opportunity to finally connect with the rest of the country through the broad network of airfields the Plan created. Curiously, this aspect of the BCATP has been largely ignored by historians who have generally focussed on the operational or military aspects of the Plan. F.J. Hatch's *The Aerodrome of Democracy* and Spencer Dunmore's *Wings for Victory* are arguably the two finest military surveys of the BCATP's full operational scope, and as such do not consider the Plan's effect on the Canadian home front at all. While Peter Conrad's *Training for Victory* does address the immediate impact of the Plan on local communities through a survey of the operation of hostess clubs and the recreational activities that involved servicemen and women, it is rather brief and limited in its focus. Conrad's final chapter on the legacy of the Plan gives only a cursory nod toward many of the topics examined in this paper.[6] Perhaps the closest any historian has approached the exploration of the Plan's enduring legacy on the prairies is Brereton Greenhous and Norman Hillmer's 1981 paper: "The Impact of the BCATP on Western Canada:

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[5] *Ibid.* p. 388.

[6] Peter C Conrad. *Training for Victory: The Commonwealth Air Training Plan in the West.* Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989. pp. 153-158.

Some Saskatchewan Case Studies."[7] Although primarily concerned with those effects of the Plan which lasted only for the duration of the war, their investigations point toward the massive, long-term legacies of the BCATP that this work pursues.

While the immediate impact of the BCATP on the prairie provinces was influential to these previous academic investigations of its powerful influence, it has become clear in the decades since the war that the Plan contributed far more than just a short-term infusion of cash to an economically hard-hit region. In fact, the BCATP had a tremendous number of fortuitous and unanticipated side effects, from advancements in aviation and the transport industry to increased petroleum exploration resulting from the huge demand for oil and aviation fuel to keep the plan running for the duration of the war.[8] The consequences of these latter explorations can be seen in discoveries like the 1947 Leduc oil find which has transformed Alberta into a world class economy.

In light of the tremendous stimulus brought about by the advent of the Plan, this study seeks to explore the BCATP's important long-term regional impact on infrastructure expansion, cultural enrichment, industrial development and technological progress that contributed significantly to the region's rapid postwar urbanization and economic growth as well as its newfound political influence in the Canadian national arena—important legacies which continue to the present.

THE BIRTH AND SCOPE OF THE BCATP

In the late 1930's, as the threat of war with Germany seemed more and more likely, British military planners had become aware of a need for additional air training facilities for the

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[7] Brereton Greenhous and Norman Hillmer, "The Impact of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan on Western Canada: Some Saskatchewan Case Studies." *Journal of Canadian Studies*. 16. Nos. 3 and 4 (Fall/Winter 1981),

[8] David H. Breen. "Introduction." *William Stewart Herron: Father of the Petroleum Industry in Alberta*. ed. David H. Breen. Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta, 1984. p. xxxix.

expected conflict. The importance of a robust air force had become steadily clearer since the First World War, and the more recent Spanish Civil War had only served to underscore that conviction. Clearly, there was no location in Europe outside the reach of the *Reich's* airpower, and much of the empire was too distant to facilitate the rapid delivery of trained aircrews necessary to combat Germany's air force successfully. Only Canada met the necessary requirements for the Plan: close enough to Europe to make the transfer of aircrews practical, yet distant enough not to be threatened by a European war. In addition, Canada possessed immense, open spaces and relatively clear weather for pilot and aircrew training, as well as a pioneering history in aviation technology and flight development. Perhaps more importantly, Canada bordered the United States, a nation with vast resources and tremendous industrial productivity, and a nation where the production of aircraft and air weapons were already a part of its seemingly inexhaustible engineering output. When it came time to set the BCATP plan into effect, the location was obvious; it only required the necessary negotiations to make it happen—a process that was to be as rigorous as the flight training the Plan's students would soon undergo.

THE HISTORY BEHIND THE PLAN

The origin of the program that was for many Canadians the most visible part of Canada's contribution to the war can be found in the years of the First World War. At that time, the nascent military potential of the emergent technology of airpower was becoming obvious, as German zeppelins were bombing London, and primitive bombers threatened civilian populations of continental Europe while young men in bi-planes duelled for control of the skies over enemy lines. Although Canada was itself slow to act on the potential of an air service, Great Britain established a wing of the Royal Flying Corps in the Dominion in 1917.[9] Tasked with the recruiting and provision of elementary pilot training to Canadians for overseas service, the RFC

[9] Conrad. *Training for Victory. Op Cit.* p. 4.

BRITISH COMMONWEALTH AIR TRAINING PLAN

PILOT TRAINING SITES IN WESTERN CANADA: 1940-1945

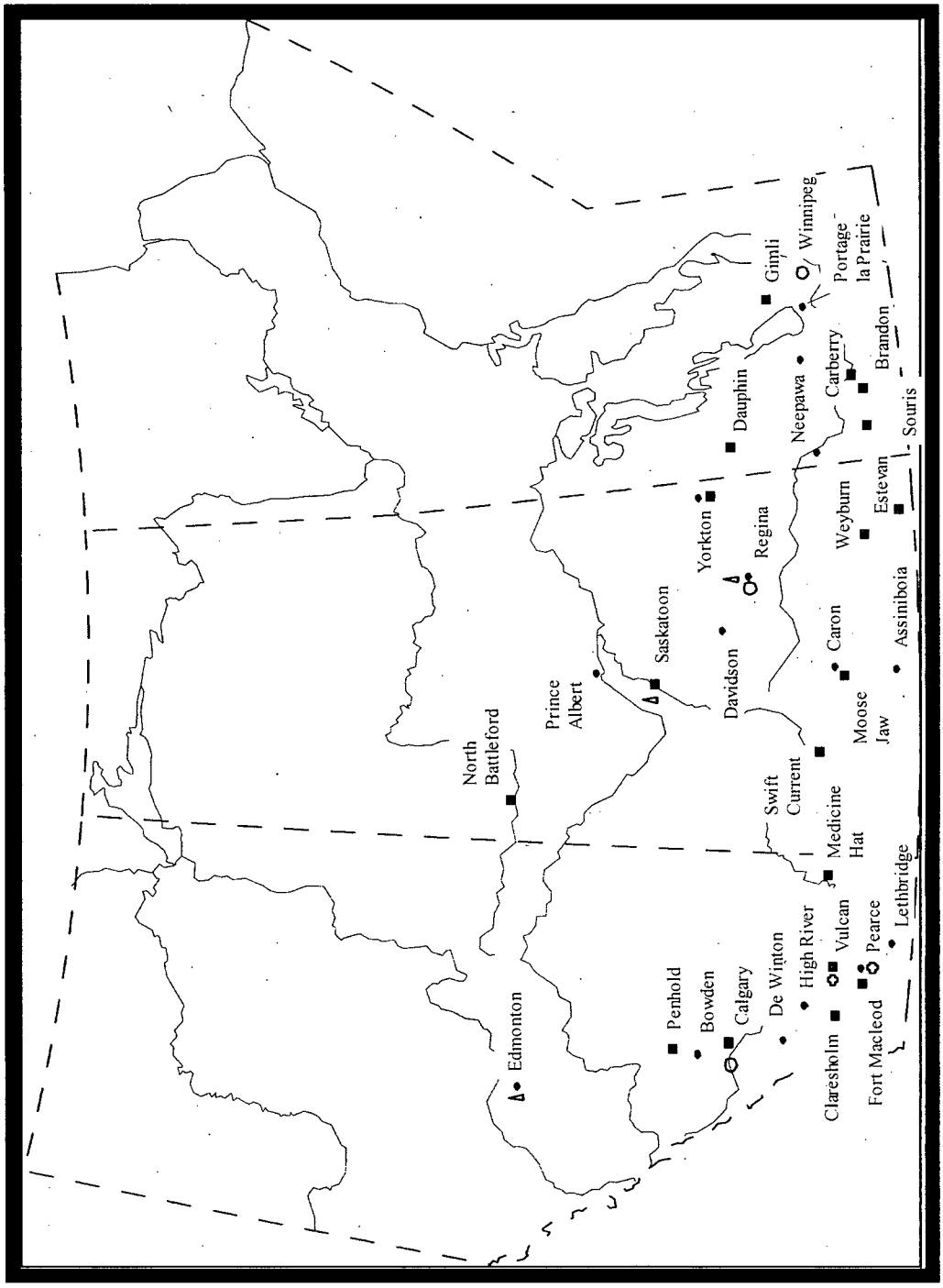

Figure 1. Map Adapted From: W.A.B. Douglas. *The Creation of a National Air Force: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force.* Vol. 2. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1986. Between pp. 236-237.

BRITISH COMMONWEALTH AIR TRAINING PLAN

AIRCREW TRAINING SITES IN WESTERN CANADA: 1940-1945

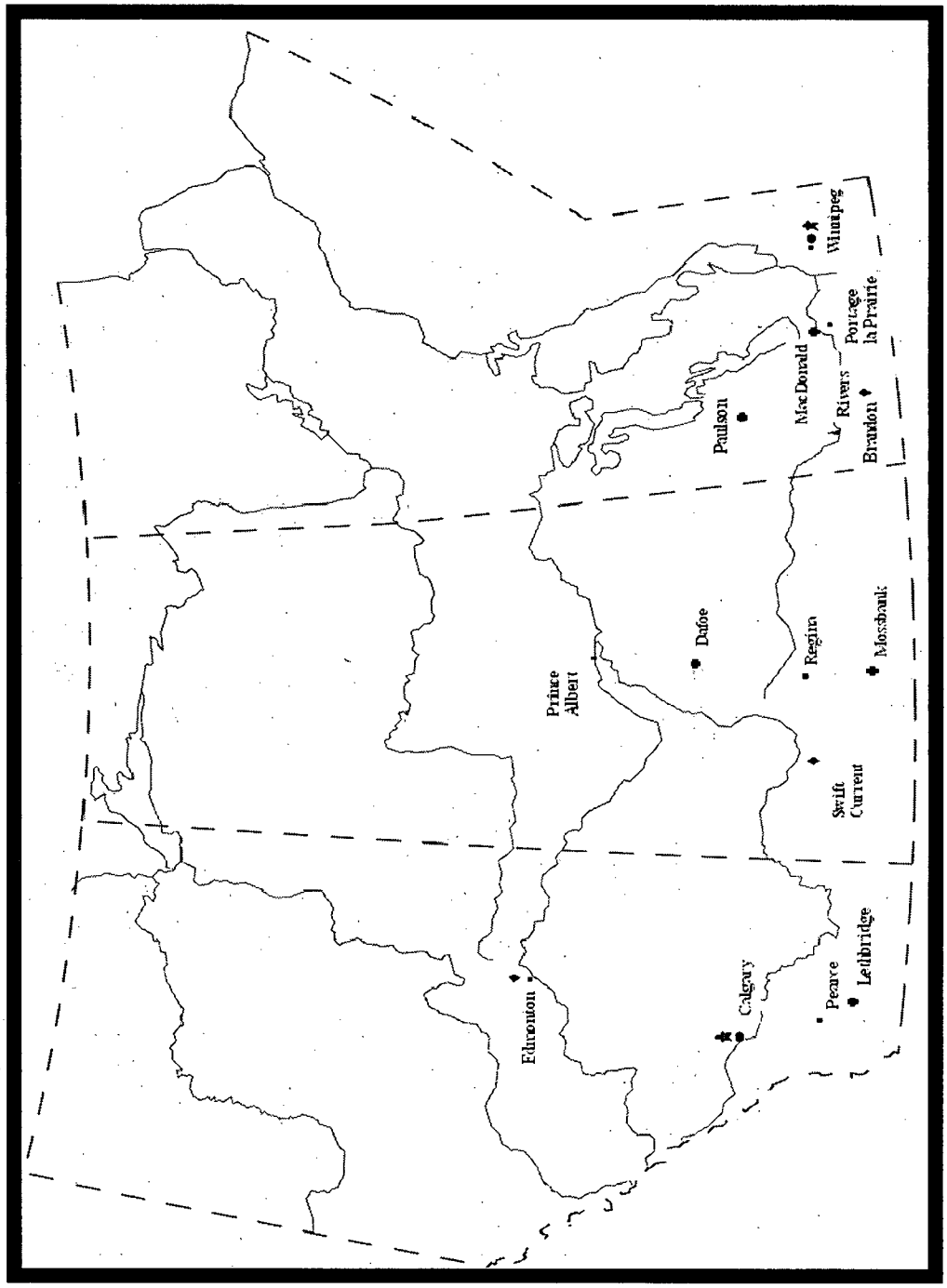

Figure 2. Map Adapted From: W.A.B. Douglas. *The Creation of a National Air Force: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force.* Vol. 2. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1986. Between pp. 236-237.

Canada competed with the insatiable recruiting drives of the Canadian army's expeditionary force—a fact which was cause for significant political concern.[10]

Aside from providing young Canadian men for the British air effort, the RFC Canada (which eventually grew to encompass twenty squadrons stationed at three Ontario aerodrome sites) pursued testing and experimentation programs, most notably the cold weather testing of aircraft to determine the feasibility of operating aerial machines in the winter months.[11] By war's end, Canada, through the RFC, had provided more than three thousand aircrew and over seven thousand ground tradesmen for military service.[12] Including those Canadians who had travelled to Britain and joined the RFC directly, more than ten thousand Canadians were serving in the RFC by war's end.[13] This substantial training record, combined with the assets and aircraft remaining in the country placed Canada in a comfortable position to organize an air arm in its post-war military, and after a few years in which it operated as the Canadian Air Force, the official Royal Canadian Air Force was created on 1 April 1924.[14]

During the interwar years, Canada continued on a training path that would eventually give birth to the BCATP. Beginning in 1935, the RCAF adopted the 'Trained in Canada Scheme' as policy, and permitted the training of fifteen surplus aircrew candidates per year for service in the RAF.[15] The following year the British Air Ministry requested permission to open air training schools in Canada to take advantage of Canada's large and untroubled air space to

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[10] *Ibid.*

[11] S.F. Wise. *Canadian Airmen and the First World War: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force*. Vol. 1. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981. p. 97.

[12] Not all who were trained by the RFC Canada were Canadian. Significant numbers of American recruits completed their training in the Canada before the United States entered the war. See: Wise. *Canadian Airmen and the First World War. Op. Cit.* pp., 117-118

[13] *Ibid.* p. 593.

[14] *Ibid.* p. 62.

[15] Although agreed upon in 1935, the scheme did not get underway until 1937. F.J. Hatch. *The Aerodrome of Democracy: Canada and the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, 1939-1945*. Ottawa: Directorate of History, Department of National Defence, 1983. p. 6.

train its own members.[16] The Canadian government turned down the proposal fearing the sovereignty and autonomy political quagmire that would stem from the operation of a foreign military force on Canadian soil.[17]

In 1938 Canada allowed 120 Canadians to embark for Britain for training in the RAF. With the Dominion's sudden willingness to cooperate, and with Germany's rapid rearmament programme and hostile actions, the British government revised its 1936 air training school program and offered a new scheme in which Canada would build airfields, the RCAF would operate and staff these schools, and Britain would pick-up the tab. The hitch was that the graduates, the vast majority of which would be Canadian, were to be absorbed into the RAF—a situation Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King was unwilling to accept.[18] However, the revised training scheme opened the door for further negotiations, ones which would allow King to achieve several goals.[19]

In King's view, the experience of the First World was one in which Canada had been little more than a junior partner, nothing more than a supplier of men to a British imperial war.[20] In addition to these fears, King entered the negotiations convinced that the BCATP was "in reality a recruiting scheme for the British Air Force rather than a genuine attempt for any co-operation."[21] Preoccupied with these reservations, King was determined that in this new war, Canada would not only maintain control over its own military, but also the air arm would be the primary commitment provided by the Dominion. King felt that this control, and the 'arms length' nature of air combat, would avoid a repetition of the Conscription Crisis that marked Canada's

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[16] Rachel Lea Heide. "The Politics of British Commonwealth Air Training Plan Base selection in Western Canada." Ottawa: Carleton University Masters Thesis. 2000. p. 35.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *Ibid.* pp. 36-37.

[19] The full process of negotiation was exhaustive, complex and sometimes contradictory. For a full treatment, see: Hatch. *The Aerodrome of Democracy. Op. Cit.*

[20] William Lyon Mackenzie King. *The Diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King.* 1 July, 1938, p. 2. The National Archives of Canada. http://king.collectionscanada.ca/EN/Default.asp (accessed July 31, 2007).

[21] J. W. Pickersgill. *The Mackenzie King Record: Volume 1, 1939-1944.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960. p. 43.

participation in the first war, while additionally emphasizing Canada's autonomy.[22]

On September 1, 1939, German forces smashed into Poland touching off the War. Almost immediately, after the British declaration of war, Prime Minister Chamberlain cabled King emphasizing Britain's need for air crew, and requesting that the Dominion rapidly expand its training facilities to assist Britain.[23] King wasted no time in informing Chamberlain that Canada would indeed augment its training facilities; however, even with the added impetus of the War, the negotiations did not appear to accelerate.

While the Canada / Britain negotiations plodded along into September, the final elements that would define the Commonwealth nature of what would become the BCATP were hit upon by the Canadian and Australian High Commissioners to the United Kingdom: Vincent Massey and Stanley Bruce. Massey and Bruce determined that the air school scheme now being considered to train British recruits for the RAF at Canadian facilities was not realistic in the face of the growing German menace, and on September 16, 1939 in a meeting with British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden determined that the plan should become an empire-wide effort to train Australians, New Zealanders, Canadians and British for service in the air forces.[24] To that end, Massey and Bruce provided the British negotiators with inside information concerning the potential roadblocks their nations might put up.[25]

The Commonwealth element was now added to the British plan, although details of what to do with the enormous number of Americans interested in enlisting in the BCATP required still more negotiation and significant political chicanery for some time to come.[26] As the negotiations

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[22] *Ibid.* p. 40.

[23] Spencer Dunmore. *Wings for Victory: The Remarkable Story of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in Canada.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart. 1994. p. 34.

[24] Norman Hillmer. "Vincent Massey and the Origins of the Commonwealth Air Training Plan." *Canadian Defence Quarterly.* 16.4 (Spring 1987): p. 52.

[25] *Ibid.* p. 52.

[26] The recruiting of Americans by Canada was a particularly sticky situation. Fears that isolationist Americans would react hostilely to Canadian recruiting efforts led to political and administrative gymnastics to circumvent potential legal entanglements. Eventually, the Clayton Knight Committee began subtly recruiting within the US itself. For an excellent discussion of the Committee and of the recruiting of Americans for the BCATP see:

reached their climax, it was finally agreed to go ahead with the Plan, and a tentative lifespan was determined, extending until March 31, 1943. And so, minutes after midnight on the morning of December 17, 1939, the "Agreement Relating to the Training of Pilots and Aircraft Crews in Canada and Their Subsequent Service" was signed by King and the representatives of Britain, New Zealand and Australia.[27]

Following the December 1939 endorsement of the agreement, the process of reifying the enormously complex designs the Plan entailed was immediately embarked upon. The Plan was truly national in scope, and initially called for more than fifty schools separated into four training commands spanning the nine provinces.[28] Additionally, the Royal Norwegian Air Force, serving the Norwegian government in exile, trained at a base known as 'Little Norway' in Toronto, which although not affiliated with the BCATP, was nevertheless strongly supported by it.[29]

The Plan was to be composed of three Initial Training Schools, thirteen Elementary Flying Training Schools, sixteen Service Flying Training Schools, ten Air Observer Schools, ten Bombing and Gunnery Schools, two Air Navigation Schools, four Wireless Schools and additional training schools and manning depots.[30] In addition, the Plan was designed to expand or collapse as necessary during the war's progress to ensure that no assets were wasted, while at the same time guaranteeing the necessary numbers of trained aircrews.

The effort to build this program to train the tremendous number of aircrew and pilots was daunting. The RCAF in December 1939 had a roll of only 5000 men, whereas the estimated

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Rachel Lea Heide. "Allies in Complicity: The United States, Canada, and the Clayton Knight Committee's Clandestine Recruiting of Americans for the Royal Canadian Air Force, 1940-1942." *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*. New Series v.15 (2004). pp. 207-230.

[27] King. *The Diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King. Op. Cit.* 17 December, 1939, p. 3.

[28] Several more communities hosted BCATP bases and schools, but did so when previous locations were closed and relocated. The number of schools cited here remained relatively static once the BCATP grew to its full measure. Douglas. *The Creation of a National Air Force. Op. Cit.*, Maps between pp. 236-237.

[29] For an excellent photographic history of the Royal Norwegian Air Force in Canada and 'Little Norway' in particular, see: *Little Norway in Pictures, with supplement, Norway—Yesterday and Today*. Toronto: S.J.R. Saunders, 1944.

[30] Larry Milberry. ed. *Sixty Years: The RCAF and CF Air Command, 1924-1984*. Toronto: CANAV Books, 1984. 465.

number of military and civilian staff required to run the Plan (never mind participate in combat operations) was approximately 33,000.[31] This tremendous staffing shortfall was made more significant by the requirement that the BCATP begin training its first students by May 1940, and be fully operational by April of 1942.[32] Aside from the urgency to get "manned up," was the need to locate and survey land that was suitable for clearance and development into not only modern airfields and sites for the various schools, and also the bombing and gunnery ranges attached to some bases.

The first step taken by the RCAF in realizing the Plan was the creation of its Directorate of Works and Buildings. Established in late 1939, the DWB was tasked with the enormous responsibility of designing the buildings the BCATP would require, and of supervising their construction. Toward this end, legions of engineers and draftsmen were engaged and set to work creating the thirty thousand sketch plans and one-and-a-half-million blueprints which eventually led to the construction of more than seven thousand BCATP buildings across the country.[33]

Far from the frenzied activity of the drafting tables in Ottawa, the search for serviceable sites for schools became a political, as well as topographical, exercise as communities across the nation vied to have a BCATP school located in their community. In the West, while survey parties from the Department of Transport and provincial highways departments set out to select airfield sites (which the Aerodrome Committee of the RCAF would either approve or deny), community lobbyists began stumping for BCATP facilities in their communities. Their efforts were aggressive, although not always based on the most rational of arguments.

With the crushing effects of the Great Depression still being felt in the Prairies—a region

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[31] Dunmore. *Wings for Victory. Op Cit.*, p. 55., and Conrad. *Training for Victory. Op Cit.* p. 21.

[32] Hatch. *The Aerodrome of Democracy. Op. Cit.*, p. 33.

[33] Chief of the Air Staff. *Final Report of the Chief of the Air Staff to the Members of the Supervisory Board, British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, Monday, April 16, 1945: a summary of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan from its Inception on December 17, 1939 to Termination on March 31, 1945.* Ottawa: Royal Canadian Air Force, 1945. pp. 10-11.

where in 1936 over 76,000 people were unemployed out of a total workforce of less than half a million[34]—the economic boon represented by the BCATP drove communities to petition their members of parliament, the RCAF and the prime minister. The fact that the first announcements of base selections were not made until after the March 26, 1940 federal election not only granted King and the Liberal Party the opportunity to use BCATP base selection as an election carrot (The Liberals achieved their second consecutive majority government), but it also provided communities with sufficient time to petition the government for a base. Some communities organized civic deputations which were sent to Ottawa,[35] while others sought to make their communities appear more desirable, as in the case of Yorkton, Saskatchewan which proudly informed Ottawa that it could provide a potential BCATP site with all the potable water it could need below cost.[36]

For the most part, however, petitions took the form of letters or telegrams, either from the communities themselves or from their members of parliament. King himself lobbied on behalf of his riding in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.[37] The quantity of correspondence lobbying for BCATP consideration is so extensive that some historians have concluded that base selection was largely a product of lobbying and almost certainly of patronage. Indeed, Peter Conrad contends that "Liberal constituencies received a school early in the war," while "few Conservative constituencies received facilities."[38] That King's own riding received two schools has undoubtedly contributed to this line of reasoning.

However, this longstanding conclusion, that Liberal patronage and aggressive lobbyists were successful in having BCATP bases located in their communities, has recently been

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[34] *Census of the Canadian Prairies, 1936. op. Cit.,* pp. 152-155, 604-605, 1048-1049.

[35] Estevan, North Battleford, Yorktown and Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan all sent deputations to Ottawa. Greenhous and Hillmer. "The Impact of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan." *Op. Cit.*, pp. 134.

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] 15 May 1936 letter from W.L. Mackenzie King to I. A. Mackenzie (Minister of National Defence). National Archives of Canada. RG 12. Vol. 3106 File 515-C135 Pt. 1.

[38] Conrad. *Training For Victory. Op. Cit.,* p. 35.

challenged. In a study exploring the politics of BCATP base selection in western Canada, Rachel Heide, through an exhaustive collation and analysis of the correspondence of community lobbyists and government ministers, has concluded that there is "no evidence in the historical record that BCATP site selection was used for patronage or that lobbying from hopeful communities influenced the decisions made."[39]

Regardless of whether or not patronage or lobbying played a role in the process of site selection, the concerns regarding the potential impact of political patronage, and the emphasis placed on community lobbying efforts (which Heide's research shows was considerable) indicate the significant importance prairie communities placed on the BCATP program. With the bleak experience of the Great Depression still lingering, this is not at all surprising, and prairie towns aggressively sought to be a part of the BCATP. Considering the program eventually encompassed 105 flying training schools and 184 support units at 231 sites, operated by 104,000 staff, and responsible for eventually training 131,553 pilots and aircrew, The BCATP's impact was enormous and offered a great deal of economic hope to the western provinces. [40]

THE OPERATION OF THE PLAN

Surprisingly, the operation of the BCATP was not as convoluted as was the process by which it was created. Designed as a streaming system which would rapidly shunt candidates into the air trades for which they were best suited, the Plan was fashioned along the lines of a flow chart, with bulk candidates entering at one end of the system, passing from skill check to skill check, and trained aircrews, qualified in specific trades, emerging from the opposite end. In this manner, the wastage (failure) rate was kept low, and for those unsuitable for aircrew training, there was the availability of numerous RCAF support trades.

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[39] Heide. "The Politics of British Commonwealth Air Training Plan Base Selection in Western Canada." *Op. Cit.*, p. 13.

[40] Milberry. *Sixty Years. Op. Cit.*, p. 469.

The BCATP was composed of several different schools and depots. The first stop for the majority of aircrew candidates was the manning depot, a holding site where aspirants were educated in the basics of military life, dress and deportment, marching and general service knowledge.[41] From the manning depot, the aircrew hopefuls were sent to one of the seven Initial Training Schools spread across Ontario, Quebec and Saskatchewan. At the ITS recruits were taught basic aeronautical theory, including mathematics, navigation and aerodynamics, with the aim of determining each recruit's suitability for an air trade.[42] In addition, the ITS offered potential aircrews the opportunity to "fly" the Link Trainer, a flight simulator that encouraged many recruits to pursue trades other than pilot.[43] At this stage, recruits were directed toward one of several trades including pilot, navigator, wireless operator or air gunner.

For those chosen to proceed to pilot training, the next steps on the BCATP journey were the Elementary Flying Training School (EFTS), where trainees received approximately fifty hours of single engine aircraft flight time and further aeronautical theory, and the Service Flying Training School (SFTS) where they were drilled in the mysteries of aerial navigation and sweated through night and formation flying exercises.[44] For graduates of the SFTS, the next stop was generally an Operational Training Unit (OTU) generally in Britain, where they received their combat training on bombers or fighter aircraft. The few OTUs in Canada were situated on the coasts, and trained their pilots to operate coastal patrol aircraft.[45] For those who did not go on to an OTU the next stop was usually a flying instructor's school, where they learned the skills necessary to train other BCATP recruits to fly, or in rare cases, to a bombing and gunnery school

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[41] The Nanton Lancaster Society, "The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan." The Nanton Lancaster Society Air Museum. http://www.lancastermuseum.ca/bcatp.html (accessed July 31, 2007).

[42] *Ibid.*

[43] Dunmore. *Wings for Victory. Op. Cit.,* pp. 78-82.

[44] I. Norman Smith. *The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan.* Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1941. p. 14.

[45] The only exception was #1 OTU at Bagotville, Quebec, which trained fighter pilots. Douglas. *The Creation of a National Air Force. Op. Cit.,* p. 290.

as a target tow plane pilot—the worst possible task for a BCATP graduate.[46]

For BCATP recruits not in line for pilot positions, the options were legion. Air Observers (later Navigators) were essential to transport and bombing crews, as were wireless operators, bomb aimers and gunners. Each of these disciplines had their own schools, as did some of the more non-traditional air force trades such as the BCATP School of Cookery in Guelph, Ontario and the School of Aviation Medicine in Toronto.[47] What all of the schools had in common was the advanced management system under which they operated, and the smooth process by which unsuitable candidates were rapidly identified (at any time in their training) and redirected into another trade for which they were more capable. This sophisticated resource management process allowed a massive program like the BCATP to operate extremely efficiently in all of its varied schools and depots across the country while producing trained aircrews in record time.

For these recruits, the one constant in their journey through training was travel, as the various schools were situated in a seemingly random pattern across the country. For the most part, the EFTS and SFTS were centred in the prairies, and it was to these communities that the new bases and many of the Plan's staff and students came to prepare the Commonwealth's air forces for war. The coming of the Plan brought enormous change to the prairies, transforming much of the region in its wake, and helping to drag the country's agricultural heartland out of its lingering economic depression.

THE IMMEDIATE IMPACT OF THE PLAN

To the people of the prairies, a region still reeling from a decade of economic depression coupled with drought and followed by global war, the announcement of a massive, trans-national

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[46] Dunmore. *Wings for Victory*. Op. Cit., pp. 86.
[47] *Ibid*. p. 360.

military program that would inject enormous sums of cash into each region of the country while establishing a host of technologically advanced airfields must have seemed a godsend. Indeed, the feverish desire to secure a BCATP school or site saw, as mentioned, the mobilization of civic deputations and lobbying campaigns from many communities and members of parliament.

The understanding that the BCATP represented not only vast and immediate sums of money to host communities, but perhaps more importantly, vital air links after the war was grasped by most listeners almost immediately upon hearing the initial radio announcement. In Medicine Hat, Alberta (population, 9,593), the local newspaper rapidly began covering the "intense interest" locals had in the prospects of securing an RCAF facility.[48] The excitement with which the possibility was greeted had as much to do with the significant "monetary advantages" as it did with the exciting postwar legacies of an airfield where "air training will not by any means cease with the discontinuance of the war."[49] Further west, in tiny High River, Alberta, "the whole town was hoping" to be selected as the location for a BCATP site. The town demonstrated a pragmatic, short-term hope that the BCATP would bring with it "better business, [a] demand for homes and a general livening up of life in the town," and shared Medicine Hat's patent desire for town officials to "bestir themselves to get the air station opened."[50]

That the Plan would bring a flood of money was certain; unfortunately, the total amount it eventually did bring to the region (or the nation as a whole) is hard to determine in precise terms. In 1945, the final accounting of the BCATP was completed, and the books closed; however, the nebulous financial summary of the BCATP was, in reality, as much an exercise of estimation as it was of accounting. To finalize the Plan's financial record, a team of accountants worked for six months to produce a final balance sheet for the entire program, but did not

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[48] "Pilot-Training School." *The Medicine Hat News*. 1 Jan. 1940. p. 2.

[49] *Ibid.* Interestingly, the article is almost prescient in its vision of a long-term postwar relationship between the small community and the RCAF, considering the postwar NATO presence and current Canadian air force operations.

[50] "To Secure Airport." *The High River Times*. 4 Jan. 1940. p. 2.

produce a final regional breakdown. Nevertheless, a sense of the enormous sums of money dispensed in the Prairie West is suggested by a comparison of the total monetary cost of the BCATP with the percentage of schools and sites located in the prairies.

To approach a reasonable figure for the BCATP funds spent in the prairies, the final summary of the Plan, which determined that the total money submitted by the four contributing nations was $1,757,367,389.86 (approximately $16,736,833,284.38 in 2007 dollars), must be balanced against the total amount of BCATP assets in the three prairie provinces.[51] All told, the Prairie's sixty schools at thirty-seven sites constituted approximately forty percent of the total BCATP program.[52] Comparing these two numbers, it seems reasonable to assume that somewhere in the neighbourhood of $702,946,955.94 (1945 Dollars) was spent across the prairies during the four years the Plan was in operation.

The method by which this money was spent in the prairies is important, as the initial infusion that came with the construction of a BCATP facility was not a one-time deal. Granted, the annual construction expenditures of $60,000,000 in 1940, and $80,000,000 in 1942 were incredible boosts to provincial economies;[53] however, the long term operation of the Plan required constant funding as students had to be fed, which required the produce of local farmers, and often the cooking skills of scores of women. Administration and maintenance of the facilities also required a constant infusion of funds which went to local contractors for the upkeep of base facilities. However, it was in wages where the single largest dispensation of funds occurred.

In the final report on the BCATP, it was calculated that $600,000,000 was charged to the

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[51] Hatch. *The Aerodrome of Democracy. Op Cit.* p. 200.

[52] This is a difficult number to pin down, as each airfield had several auxiliary fields that counted as individual sites, but which were often sparsely developed. For these calculations, however, only primary bases have been counted. In addition, of the total 289 BCATP sites, many were unstaffed, auxiliary sites as well, and do not figure in these figures. See: Hatch. *The Aerodrome of Democracy. Op. Cit.,* pp. 207-212.

[53] Chief of the Air Staff. *Final Report. Op. Cit.,* p. 10

Plan in pay and allowances.[54] Again, using the estimate of forty percent for the prairie region, this amounts to $240,000,000 flowing into the region in biweekly surges. It is important to consider that not all of the wages were solely destined for air force pockets. At the Elementary Flying Training Schools and the Air Observer Schools, the exigencies of the immediate need for instructors saw the employment of civilian flying club instructors as staff throughout much of the Plan's tenure.[55] Stereotypically notorious for their inability to save money, soldiers are commonly greeted by local merchants with open arms. Undoubtedly, it was the same with the students of the BCATP, most of whom were young and unattached. Additionally, the military instructional staff was permitted to bring wives and families to their postings, a program which saw military pay spent locally, and not sent back home to waiting families. [56]

The preceding generalized list of the Plan's figures runs the risk of overwhelming any understanding of the BCATP's actual impact on small prairie communities. To better illustrate the massive transformation the Plan brought to the prairies, it is instructive to leave the regional examination of the Plan, and instead briefly focus on one small community's pre-war circumstances and the ways in which the local implementation of the BCATP radically changed its fortunes.

High River is a small town in Alberta's semi-arid southwest corner. The local economy, based on ranching and dry land farming, was, like those of all prairie towns, hit hard by the Great Depression and the agricultural disaster that arrived with it. Throughout the Thirties the town stagnated, and the small community's population had dropped by five percent during the depression to 1,395 citizens at the outbreak of the Second World War.[57] Although suffering from the devastating drought of the 1930's, the small community was still prone to spring flooding due

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[54] *Ibid.* p. 38.
[55] Milberry. *Sixty Years. Op. Cit.,* p. 99.
[56] Conrad. *Training For Victory.* Op. Cit., pp. 134-141.
[57] Dominion Bureau of Statistics Canada. *Seventh Census of Canada, 1931. Volume II. Population by Areas.* Ottawa: J.O.Patenaude, 1933. p. 238.

to poor infrastructure and town site planning, and on the whole can be seen as an exemplar of an

Figure 3. Flooded Downtown High River, Alberta. 1942. Glenbow Archive. Image: NA-67-32.

economically depressed, drought stricken, small prairie town like hundreds of others across the region.

In 1941, selection of the community as a BCATP site was a blessing for High River. The location of an ultra modern, Class C Elementary Flying Training School meant that in addition to the 218 pilot trainees the base hosted in April 1944, it also boasted a civilian and military staff in excess of three hundred, with an estimated operating payroll of $499,890.00 per year.[58] By February of that same year, the government had spent $2,292,273.30 on the station's construction and operational expenses since it was established.[59] All told, by mid 1944 when the Plan was terminated, the station had brought close to four million dollars to the community and the province—numbers which take on greater significance when it is remembered that #5 EFTS was

[58] "British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, Elementary Flying Training Schools Summary of Estimated Costs upon which Remuneration under Schedule II of the Agreement is Based." p. 4. Canadian Forces Directorate of History and Heritage. 181.009 (D3). and, *Daily Diary of # 5 EFTS High River, Alberta 30 April, 1944.* National Archives of Canada. RG24. Reel. MR-12,337.

[59] K. B Conn. "Memorandum in Reply to the Request Made of the Minister of National Defence by Mr. Cruickshank.21 February, 1944." Canadian Forces Directorate of History and Heritage. 181.009 (D5817).

just one of Alberta's twenty-one BCATP sites. [60] In addition to the transformations wrought by

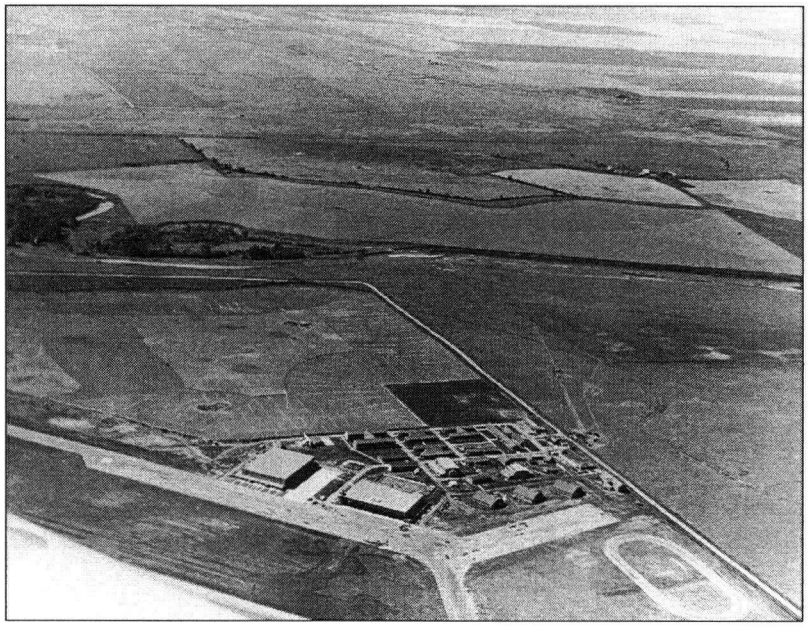

Figure 4. #5 EFTS. High River, Alberta, Circa 1945. Glenbow Archive. Image: NA-3277-73.

the deluge of money to the community, the population of the town, as a result of #5 EFTS's military and civilian staff, their wives and children, swelled by over forty percent in one year, and housing as in so many BCATP communities demanded a premium.[61] Due to the BCATP presence, High River was not only economically thriving, but also bustling with an exciting, new energy derived from the flood of Commonwealth military personnel and the sense of the town's important contribution to Canada's war effort. The gleaming, modern airfield at the school also held exciting potential for the town's future, as it meant the town could participate in the postwar aviation future the BCATP promised.

The upshot of this strong diffusion pattern is that from the beginning of the BCATP in early 1940 until its closure five years later in the spring of 1945, a steady flow of money into the prairies (combined with the absence of thousands of the unemployed who had gone off to serve

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[60] Although a significant portion of this money was paid to big city contractors for runway and hangar construction, those company's employees lived and worked in High River during construction, spending some of their pay packet to do so.

[61] Greenhous and Hillmer. "The Impact of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan." *Op. Cit.,* pp. 136.

overseas) saw the region snatched out of the depression of the 1930's, and placed on an economic fast track to a future replete with modern airfields and expanded infrastructure.

In their 1981 paper: "The Impact of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan on Western Canada: Some Saskatchewan Case Studies," Brereton Greenhous and Norman Hillmer were the first to delve into the frenzied way in which smaller prairie communities greeted the arrival of the BCATP in their midst. Their study highlights the ways in which the rapid influx of money and people influenced the lives of the largely rural communities in which the BCATP operated and the solid foundation for ongoing modernization it left behind in its wake.

One of the first, and most profound, impacts of the BCATP on the prairie communities was the establishment and construction of the site and facilities of the school. Immediately, contractors from the province's urban areas were engaged to construct runways, raise hangars, build classrooms, mess halls and barracks, and to lay and pave roads.[62] The rapid need for the heavy, urban contracting outfits recognized no provincial boundaries, and the runway construction and field lighting contract for the BCATP facility at Vulcan Alberta for example, was let to the Tomlinson Contracting Company of Winnipeg.[63] Issues of water supply had also to be dealt with, and for many communities in the prairies the BCATP was best known for improving or expanding the water supply.[64] Smaller contracts, such as site clearance and drainage trenching were let to local contractors in the area around the new bases.[65] The overall effect of the way in which the development contracts were let assured a broad diffusion of money across the prairies and an opportunity for businesses in communities that were not favoured with a BCATP base to participate in the grand scheme

With all of the construction opportunities the BCATP afforded, some clever

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[62] Dunmore. *Wings for Victory. Op. Cit.,* p. 210.

[63] "Contract Let for Construction of Service Flying Training School." *The Vulcan Advocate.* August 21, 1941. p. 1.

[64] Greenhous and Hillmer. "The Impact of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan." *Op. Cit.,* p. 134.

[65] *Ibid.* p. 135.

communities took advantage of the situation to further improve their own lot. In both Yorktown and Weyburn Saskatchewan, for instance, community leaders availed themselves of the nearby asphalting equipment at BCATP job sites, and black-topped various roads in their communities.[66] Improvements such as these breathed life into the region after a decade of depression and the Plan brought with it a further sense of purpose as small communities began to feel an active part of Canada's war effort.

With the tremendous construction boom afforded by the BCATP, and with the thousands of men leaving for overseas service, the relief rolls, a grim legacy of the Great Depression, were emptied. By November 1940, Yorktown, typical of the small, agriculturally dependant communities of the prairies, could report that all able bodied men were off the relief rolls.[67] High River's hopes that the Plan would see a 'livening up of life in the town,' had no doubt been answered, as jobs and money became readily available to those who had not gone off to war.

In addition to the changes noted by Greenhous and Hillmer, the short-term population explosion caused by the Plan brought about new dynamics in these insular communities, as the War's voracious demand for young men drew thousands away from small prairie towns, while the BCATP replaced them (and then some) with men from other parts of Canada or the Commonwealth. For these largely agrarian communities, the contact with men from the far corners of the Commonwealth, or even from urban parts of Canada was a transformative experience.

From the establishment of the first BCATP Site in the prairies, contact between the military personnel and the civilian populace was not only tolerated, but was heavily encouraged. Generally, it can be assumed that even today military authorities encourage friendly (if somewhat aloof) relations with local communities, but the emphasis placed on Air Force /

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[66] *Ibid.* p. 135.
[67] *Ibid.*

Civilian socialization by the BCATP was exceptional. The unit diary for #32 EFTS (RAF) at Bowden, Alberta, for June 24, 1941 records that games and competitions against local teams had been organized and carried out "very successfully."[68] This anecdotal piece of evidence takes on much greater significance when it is considered that #32 EFTS had been relocated to Canada fewer than three weeks before, yet it had viewed the organization of sporting events with the locals as a priority nonetheless.[69]

In other communities, the BCATP's central place in the social calendar was no different. When #5 EFTS High River, Alberta prepared to begin operations, the entire town was invited, and a half-day holiday was declared to permit attendance by the townsfolk (a not uncommon event at base openings).[70] At the opposite end of events, #2 Flight Instructor School at Vulcan, Alberta took out a three-quarter page advertisement for its April 1943 farewell carnival.[71] With tickets available at many local Vulcan establishments, the event boasted two bands in attendance, a $200.00 grand prize for the sporting types, and extensive transit service to get locals to the event—it was undoubtedly the town's social high point of the war.[72] Throughout the years of operation, the BCATP personnel remained in the forefront of civilian life. Doreen Hodgson, a schoolgirl during the war, remembered frequently hearing #15 EFTS's band practicing while she was in class, it seemed that even when the band was not performing at an official event it was part of the normal background of the neighbourhood.[73]

This interaction, between the air force personnel and the civilian population was undoubtedly encouraged for two significant reasons: the need for positive public relations to encourage recruiting and permit smooth operations of the military bases amidst civilian

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[68] *Daily Diary of #32 EFTS. RAF. Bowden, Alberta. 24 June, 1941.* National Archives of Canada. RG24. Reel. C-12340.

[69] Indeed, at this time, #32 was not even in operation at Bowden, Alberta, but at its early, temporary site in Swift Current, Saskatchewan, and these games could only contribute marginally to BCATP / civilian relations.

[70] "Air School Officials Extend Invitation to General Public to Attend Opening Ceremony." *The High River Times*. September 18, 1941. p. 1.

[71] #2 FIS was moved to Pearce, Alberta in May of that year.

[72] "Farewell Carnival." *The Vulcan Advocate*. April 8, 1943. p. 3.

[73] Doreen Hodgson, interview by author, questionnaire, Vancouver, BC., 30 March 2007.

communities, and the need to promote positive morale among young trainees who in many cases were from distant, urban centres, and not at all adapted to Canada's isolated, prairie communities. Regardless of the motives, the association between BCATP personnel and the civilian population resulted in 3,750 marriages of Canadian women to RAF, RAAF, RNZAF and other allied nationals.[74]

In addition, this sudden association wrought an amorphous, difficult to measure infusion of new ideas as these young, foreign and largely urban-raised young men mixed with the peoples of the prairies—a region, which despite the cosmopolitan nature of its ethnic make up, demonstrated a significant predilection toward farmers. Indeed, in 1936 sixty-four percent of people lived in non-urban areas in Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan.[75] To suddenly be flooded with legions of foreign men, the vast majority of whom were not farmers could not have been anything but a tremendous cultural shift for the people of the prairies.

In Medicine Hat Alberta, the pre-war population had been 9,592. During the war, the number rose to 10,571, and by its end, the population had plateaued at 12,859—an increase of more than one third.[76] This growth indicates one of the less positive side effects of the Plan as BCATP civilian employees, as well as instructional staff and their families inundated the small towns and villages of the prairies creating a housing shortage which, combined with a severe dearth of construction materials, rapidly led to outrageous rent prices and some hostilities between the civilian and military populations.[77]

When in spring 1942, with the expiration of the original BCATP agreement approaching, and no end to the war in sight, Prime Minister Mackenzie King broadcast to Canadians that the

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[74] Chief of the Air Staff. *Final Report. Op. Cit.*, p. 27.

[75] *Census of the Canadian Prairies, 1936. Op. Cit.*, pp. 40, 442, 906.

[76] *Ibid.* p. 833., and *Census of the Prairie Provinces. Vol. II. Occupations, Industries, Earnings, Employment and Unemployment.* Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1949. p. 399.

[77] With these vast numbers of Commonwealth men and women "invading" the rural towns of the prairies, friction was bound to happen. Fortunately, the troubles were limited to a few fights and bouts of name calling. For a brief description of the troubles in Saskatchewan, see: Greenhous and Hillmer. "The Impact of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan." *Op. Cit.*, pp. 140-141.

BCATP had been successfully extended to cover the period from July 1942 to March 1945 and would cost approximately one and a half billion dollars, Canadians realised that the Plan was here to stay for a while, and that they had to adapt to the new conditions and work together. It is perhaps as much this realisation, as it was the pragmatic necessity of accepting the way things were in BCATP communities that resulted in the remarkably few problems between townsfolk and the military staff and students of BCATP schools.

Indeed, by any measuring stick, the effect of the Plan on the prairies was a positive one, with improved infrastructure, and economic benefits far outweighing any crowding issues. The impact of the influx of trainees and staff added to the culture of the region through the institution of concerts, plays, sporting events and the ubiquitous prairie "social," or dance. Among the most interesting stimulus to prairie culture was the RCAF and BCATP's profound influence on the role of women and the way they lived and worked. In this area, the Plan's long-term effect paid enormous dividends to the post-war women's movement by contributing to the ongoing politicization of prairie women by reinforcing their awareness of their inequitable circumstances.

WOMEN AND THE PLAN

At the start of the war in 1939, women had never served in the Canadian military. True, they had served as nursing sisters and in other voluntary capacities during the First World War; however, they had never been recruited directly into a uniformed branch of the armed services. This changed in July 1941 when Canada, following Britain's 1939 lead, established first the Canadian Women's Auxiliary Air Force (CWAAF) and shortly thereafter the Canadian Women's Army Corps.[78] A year later, the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service (the WRCNS known more often as the WREN's) was created, effectively filling out the three

[78] In early 1942, restructuring of the CWAAF saw it become an official division of the RCAF, and was renamed the Royal Canadian Air Force (Women's Division). Its members immediately became known as the WDs.

branches of the Canadian armed services with female recruits.

Although separate from the BCATP, the enormous prairie presence of the Plan, with the predominance of RCAF facilities over those of the other services meant that the RCAF (WD) was the service of choice for the vast majority of prairie women.[79] In Saskatchewan alone, nearly fifty percent of all female recruits chose the air branch to serve in.[80] The motto of the RCAF (WD): 'We Serve that Men May Fly,' clearly indicated that women were to take a subaltern position to that of their male comrades; however, the RCAF (WD) was not a false shadow of its RCAF counterpart, and women were trained, and served, as aero engine mechanics, airframe technicians, weapons technicians, military police and a host of other vitally important wartime tasks.[81] The WD was indeed a real branch of the military and had tremendous impact on the lives of the women who joined and on the communities in which they served. During the war, and in the years after, this impact led to a profound change in the perceptions of the roles of women and contributed to a powerful reinforcement of the gendered politicization of prairie women earlier advanced by the likes of prominent prairie women like Justice Emily Murphy and Nellie McClung who had spearheaded the successful women's suffrage campaign of the early 1900's in organizations like Winnipeg's Political Equality League, founded in 1912.[82]

In Canada at large, the 1940's were a time when women were just gaining the right to vote in provincial elections in Quebec, and equal pay legislation was decades in the future. In the prairies however, things were far more progressive, and women like McClung and Murphy were among the vanguard of an aggressive social movement composed of men and women who

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[79] Although the RCAF (WD) was technically separate from the BCATP, the WD statistics and operational parameters were reported as part of the BCATP in the Plan's final report. Chief of the Air Staff. *Final Report. Op. Cit.,* p. 22.

[80] Greenhous and Hillmer. "The Impact of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan." *Op. Cit.,* p. 143.

[81] *Selection of Standard Tradeswomen by Recruiting Centers. 24 Sept, 1943.* National Archives of Canada. RG24 Vol. 3543. File 927-25-8.

[82] For a summary of the efforts of Emily Murphy and Nellie McClung in the famous Persons Case, see: Monique Benoit. *The Persons Case.* Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 2000. For information on the Political Equality League see: Debbie Hathaway. "The Political Equality League of Manitoba." *Manitoba History* [Canada] 1982 (3): 8-10.

succeeded in seeing the prairies become the region where women were first granted the right to vote in 1916, and where the causes of married women's property rights and mothers' allowances had been initiated and successfully fought in the first years of the twentieth century.[83] The pioneering efforts of men and women in homesteading the rough prairie saw the evolution of a unique partnership between the sexes that manifested in politics. Many prairie men saw the arduousness of women's tasks in homesteading as deserving of the reward of franchise, with the result that the region displayed an exceptional progressiveness in women's rights.[84]

However, although markedly more advanced in the acknowledgement of women's equality than was the rest of the nation, the prairies were still a region, where, at the outbreak of the war, women in Manitoba were legally prohibited from entering liquor stores or "beer parlours."[85] Moreover, provincial governments authorized paying women only two thirds (and often less) of what their male counterparts earned for the same tasks (an inequitable reality that women in the armed services would also face). [86] And so, at the dawn of the war, women in the west were in the enviable position of living in the region most progressive in addressing women's rights, but still faced strong cultural and political challenges to their liberties.

Into this contradictory climate of progressive women's rights and traditional gender roles, the Department of National of Defence arrived, charged with launching a campaign to encourage women to enlist, and forced to tread carefully around contemporary values which did not include women in the military. Indeed, one of the greatest hurdles women (and the Military) were forced to overcome in their desire to join the WDs was the malicious whisper campaigns that labelled military women as lacking virtue, or more frequently as fallen women.[87] Surely no "good girl"

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[83] Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer. *Alberta: A New History*. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1990. pp. 177-180.

[84] *Ibid*. p. 178.

[85] Phyllis D. Harrison. *Saga of an Airwoman*. Penticton, BC: Sage Press, 1995. p. 47.

[86] *Ibid*. p. 297.

[87] In an early war, nationwide public opinion poll, the public's judgment ranged from a belief that WDs were recruited solely from the red light districts, to the certainty that all servicewomen had syphilis. Carolyn

would join the army was often the way the reasoning went. Nevertheless, women flocked to the Air Force, eventually swelling the RCAF (WD) ranks to 17,467 by war's end.[88] Although the 'fallen women' cloud was to hang over the heads of military women for some time, the significant numbers of young, intelligent and hardworking uniformed women that began to appear across the prairies rapidly altered the way in which women were perceived. Soon, prairie people accepted the WDs with open arms, going out of their way to treat them to theatre tickets or meals in their own homes— conduct identical to that received by the male Commonwealth trainees.[89]

For many women, the WD was their first taste of "real" equality with their male counterparts. Phyllis Harrison, a Manitoba native, and therefore prohibited from entering drinking establishments, was stunned to receive a liquor permit along with her issued kit. The permit, which allowed military women to purchase liquor (which was of course tightly rationed during the war), was a heady privilege, and she was "giddy to think [I] had now joined the ranks of humanity free to decide to BUY A BOTTLE!"[90] Like the recruiting posters which promised "A New World, a New Horizon for Women,"[91] the RCAF (WD) delivered previously unseen experiences and opportunities for women, ones which paid enormous political dividends after the war for the women's movement.

By the mid 1970's, for example, a WD reunion was seen by some as a platform for the feminist message. At the 1976 Vancouver reunion of former WDs (the first reunion held in thirty years, and titled "Wing to the West"), Mrs. Jo Mitchell, the keynote speaker and an employee in the Women's Courses division of the British Columbia Department of Manpower, addressed the

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Gossage. *Greatcoats and Glamour Boots: Canadian Women at War (1939-1945).* Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2001. p. 162.

[88] Ruth Roach Pierson. *They're Still Women After All. The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986. p. 263 n4.

[89] Ziegler, Mary. ed. *We Serve that Men May Fly: The Story of the Women's Division Royal Canadian Air Force.* Hamilton, Ont.: R.C.A.F. (W.D.) Association, 1973. p. 77.

[90] Harrison. *Saga of an Airwoman. Op. Cit.,* p. 47.

[91] Ziegler. *We Serve that Men May Fly. Op. Cit.*, p. 114.

subject of positive changes for women in Canada since the war, touching on the importance of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women and several items of legislation that had been changed to advance the cause of women's equality.[92] Aware of the audience's wartime experiences and the feminist sympathies they often engendered, she connected these women's air force experiences with her own message that women should be hired in non-traditional occupations, and argued that their war service proved they were more than capable in "traditional" male areas.[93] The fundamental effect of her dynamic and progressive message was to retroactively highlight the WDs, and ipso facto the BCATP, as a positive vector for the feminist message.

Indeed, the RCAF (WD) did directly contribute to the political activation of its members, and reinforced the already exceptional suffrage movement begun at the dawn of the century, by not only placing them in non-traditional military tasks, often alongside men, but also through the opportunities for education that it provided. Aside from mandatory sports education, the RCAF (WD) encouraged, and provided, its members with access to various academic and trades courses, ranging from high school classes to college academics, and from administrative to clerical trades courses. Throughout the war the WD's availed themselves of opportunities for intellectual and economic self-improvement and inspired a politicization that was repaid in the contributions to the post-war feminist movement.[94]

When considering the BCATP it is generally the legacy of women who served in the RCAF (WD) that is remembered. However, the Plan significantly affected civilian women as well. Indeed, for many women, the BCATP's largest effect was much more than just salaried employment, it was personal. The sudden and continuous stream of thousands of young,

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[92] RCAF-WAAF Reunion. (University of British Columbia, June 18-20, 1976). University of British Columbia Special Collections. Audio Recording.

[93] *Ibid.*

[94] *Progress Report of RCAF (WD) for Month of October. 21 November, 1942.* p. 2. National Archives of Canada. RG7 G26 Vol. 113. File 328-C.

uniformed men into small and sometimes remote communities had an unsurprising effect on the region's unusually large female population, and the small towns of the prairies saw a sharp spike in the number of marriages.[95]

Doreen Hodgson, a high school student in Regina during the Second World War, recalled the influence that #15 EFTS across the street from Regina Central Collegiate had as she remembered the "delight and excitement" of the crowds of schoolgirls gazing at the young air force men in uniform.[96] No doubt just as much "happiness" was engendered on the other side of the fence, given that Doreen's outdoor physical education class always seemed to coincide with #15 EFTS's Friday muster, which saw not only young, uniformed men on the parade square, but the base band as well—a pleasant circumstance she remembers with great fondness today.[97] The location of #15 EFTS, across from a high school, while probably coincidental must have undoubtedly resulted in a larger number of enlistments than normal from the male students who were forced to observe the relative ease with which the airmen secured the attention of the female students and fervently desired the perceived benefits offered by the uniform.

Perhaps contributing to the delight with which the local schoolgirl population viewed the airmen were the arrangements undertaken for #15 EFTS's students to worship in the local churches rather than the base chapel. Combining religious services with military parades and honours brought the airmen and the community much closer, and resulted in many marriages. In Dorene's personal circle, three of her friends married BCATP students who chose to return to Canada after the war to make their lives.[98]

The close proximity of men from across the Commonwealth led to many enduring relationships like those recalled by Doreen Hodgson. At #34 RAF Service Flying Training

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[95] With many of the prairie's young men off serving overseas, there was a temporary imbalance in the ratio of women to men which favoured the BCATP's male students.

[96] Hodgson, interview.

[97] *Ibid.*

[98] *Ibid.*

School Medicine Hat, Alberta, a community with a 1941 population of 10,571, seventy-two marriages between BCATP personnel and local women were recorded between 1941 and 1944.[99] At #'s 8 and 41 SFTS Weyburn, Saskatchewan, twelve marriages between local women and RAF staff took place, while at #'s 13 and 35 SFTS North Battleford, Saskatchewan, thirty-four airmen married local women and returned to live in the region after the war. In 1980, fourteen still lived in North Battleford, making their livings, and contributing to their communities in roles such as municipal Fire Chief, head engineer of the local hospital and as the Secretary-Treasurer of the municipality.[100]

COMMONWEALTH AIRMEN AND THE PLAN

Although it is generally the European war brides' postwar journeys that have received historians' attentions (and to a lesser extent, the exodus of Canadian war brides emigrating to their new husbands' nations), British, Australian and New Zealand men such as the fourteen Commonwealth airmen who returned to live in North Battleford, also relocated to Canada in their thousands, to pursue careers and friendships they established during their BCATP time in the prairies and other parts of the country.

Typical of the BCATP students who returned to the prairies after the war is former Flight Lieutenant Thomas Dent who enlisted in the RAF in October 1941 and trained as a pilot until remustering to navigator in 1943.[101] Dent's training crisscrossed the prairies, and he was schooled at the #31 EFTS DeWinton, Alberta, and RAF #38 SFTS Estevan, Saskatchewan as well as at the Air Navigation School in Winnipeg, Manitoba, before returning to England for operational flying.[102] While training at the BCATP bases, Dent (and legions of other young

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[99] David J. Carter. *Prairie Wing: RAF Service Flying Training School Medicine Hat, 1941-1944.* Elkwater, Alberta: Eagle Butte Press, 2001. pp. 184-186.

[100] Greenhous and Hillmer. "The Impact of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan." *Op. Cit.,* p. 142.

[101] Thomas Dent, interview by author, questionnaire, Ottawa, Ont., 1 May 2007.

[102] *Ibid.*

Commonwealth airmen) was often invited to dinner at the homes of locals, and secured a number of life-long friendships with prairie locals.[103]

After the war, although trained by the British government as a civilian navigator, Dent left his air profession, and returned to his former career as a Cleansing Superintendent. Unfortunately, the postwar austerity measures instituted by the British government resulted in low wages and a severe housing shortage that severely affected Dent and his family.[104] By 1952, Thomas and his wife agreed that emigration to Canada seemed the best thing for them, and after a discussion with a Canadian Immigration official, Thomas left for Canada ahead of his family on the voyage to Calgary and the friends he had made there during his training at #31 EFTS DeWinton.[105] For Dent the war was over and a new life lay ahead. So to, the end of the war brought with it the end of the BCATP.

After more than four years of operation the great Canadian contribution to Allied victory drew to a close in the early months of 1945. Indeed, as the War progressed the operators of the BCATP had been keeping a close eye on the mounting costs of the Plan, and were continually preparing for its termination. As early as January 1944, the first two schools were disbanded in what was to be a process of phased closures culminating in the complete shutdown of the scheme on March 31, 1945.[106] These early closures were the result of a surplus of trained personnel and a military evaluation that the War was swiftly coming to a conclusion and foreshadowed the rapid end to the massive scheme.

Of the 231 BCATP sites operating across the country at the Plan's peak, the Canadian Military foresaw the need to keep only a portion in service after the war. With the Plan's termination, ninety-eight sites were considered surplus and were sold off (with the option that

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[103] *Ibid.*
[104] *Ibid.*
[105] *Ibid.*
[106] Chief of the Air Staff. *Final Report. Op. Cit., p.* 9.

nine could be reactivated if need be).[107] A further ninety-eight sites were retained to serve as operating bases, and an additional thirty-three were retained for storage purposes.[108] Canada's tremendous military contribution to the War was broken up and disposed of in less than a year; however, the small number of remaining sites contributed significantly to what is arguably the BCATP's greatest legacy in the Prairies: the remarkable advances in prairie commercial aviation.

THE END OF THE PLAN

For the prairie communities that faced the loss of their BCATP school, the mood was not as bleak as may be imagined. Certainly the successful conclusion of the War; the return of loved ones and the gradual end to rationing were positive factors that offset the economic implications of a base closure; however, many communities had pursued a BCATP school with its post-war value in mind, and did not overly lament its closure. *The Weyburn Review* had been bluntly pragmatic in August 1941 when it indicated that "the airport will be there when the war ends . . .. Coast to coast air transportation will be in for a boost requiring feeder lines to supply it with business, both passenger and freight, and for a community to be without an airport will be about as bad as being without a railroad."[109]

The presence of a local airport in post-war Canada was vitally important to prairie communities, but so was the presence of a post-war RCAF station. For communities fortunate to keep the RCAF in their locales, it was a continuance of the financial windfall the BCATP had ushered in, and served to maintain the relationship between the Air Force and the prairies that the War had begun. In some cases, BCATP sites were converted into Air Cadet training facilities or RCAF storage depots, while others remained as fighter or training bases well into the 1980s

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[107] *Ibid.*

[108] *Ibid.* The disposition of the remaining two bases was initially undecided, but were eventually made surplus.

[109] Quoted in Greenhous and Hillmer. "The Impact of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan." *Op. Cit.*, p. 135.

and '90s, preserving the air force as an important part of the prairie culture and society.

Aside from RCAF bases and depots which continued to dot the prairies, NATO forces began appearing on former BCATP fields during the Korean War—a much smaller, but still significant echo of the BCATP—as RCAF personnel and bases were used to train NATO air forces for Cold War operations.[110] The NATO Air Training Plan was hosted in Canada from 1950 until 1959, and saw the Government of Canada pour over 412 million dollars into the program, while training over 5000 NATO aircrew from Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Turkey and the United Kingdom.[111] In western Canada, the program operated from RCAF stations at Moose Jaw, Yorkton and Saskatoon in Saskatchewan; Calgary, Penhold, Claresholm and Edmonton in Alberta; and Rivers, Portage La Prairie, Gimli and Winnipeg in Manitoba. The NATP also operated from a major, new station constructed after the war at Cold Lake Alberta.[112] The NATO Air Training Plan continued the BCATP's legacy of hosting military personnel from around the world in prairie communities, enriching the culture of the western provinces in the process.

AVIATION AFTER THE PLAN

Although the Air Force kept a high profile on the prairies in the post war period, it was not only fighter aircraft which filled the skies of the prairies. Civil aviation took off in the late 1940's with the assistance of the BCATP, as the web of new airfields across the west connected the once remote communities of the prairies to the air links that were springing up across the continent and the globe. As *The Weyburn Review* had indicated, the airfields left behind became vital transportation and freight links, and civil aviation assisted in modernizing the region.

It is important to note that although the BCATP brought with it a significant aviation

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[110] John Gellner. *Canada in NATO*. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1970. p. 20.
[111] *Ibid.*
[112] Canadian Forces Directorate of History and Heritage. *RCAF Diaries, Finding Aid.* December 6, 1995.

legacy, the western provinces were not inexperienced with aeronautical technology prior to the Plan's inception and exhibited a strong entrepreneurial vision and energy especially in the interwar years. In 1920, Saskatchewan became home to Canada's first licensed 'air harbour' (airfield) at Groome Field. Ten years later, Winnipeg's Jim and Grant MacDonald opened the MacDonald Brothers Aircraft Company—which eventually became the internationally recognized Bristol Aerospace.[113] In these early decades, Alberta was home to many of Canada's pioneer bush pilots like the famous World War I ace, Wilfred 'Wop' May, whose civilian air reputation rivalled that of his war record.[114] The city of Edmonton saw its first aircraft take to the skies in 1911, and by 1920 was a staging ground for United States Army Air Service flights to Alaska.[115] By 1927, Edmonton had become a sophisticated, modern airport with well surfaced runways, a pair of new hangars and electric runway lighting.[116] This northern community was staged to take advantage of its location on the east/west and north/south lines of aeronautical routes—a situation it still enjoys. By 1974, Edmonton's position in Canadian aviation was so strong that the Canadian Aviation Hall of fame was established in Edmonton, and among the 189 current inductees, thirty-four hailed from the three prairie provinces. [117]

However, even with the West's long aviation heritage, it is vital to recognize what prospects the dozens of new airfields and the thousands of trained aircrew and surplus aircraft brought to the region in the post-war years. The historical foundation of bush pilots and pioneering aviators was soon to be bolstered with sleek, new jets connecting the western provinces to the major cities of the world and major, international class air transportation

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[113] *Magellan Aerospace Corporation, Bristol Aerospace Limited.* "Company History." http://www.bristol.ca/History.html (accessed 31 July 2007).

[114] Aside from participating in the shooting down of the Red Baron, Wop May is perhaps best known for his January 1932 mercy flight to deliver Diphtheria anti-toxin to Fort Vermilion in Alberta's high north. For a thorough account of Wop May's exploits, see: Sheila Reid. *Wings of a Hero: Canadian Pioneering Flying Ace Wilfred Wop May.* St. Catharines, Ont.: Vanwell Pub., 1997.

[115] Peter Pigott. *Gateways: Airports of Canada.* Lawrencetown Beach, Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 1996. p. 56.

[116] *Ibid.* p. 58.

[117] *Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame.* "Profiles of Members." http://www.cahf.ca/Members%20and%20Belt%20of%20Orion/members/A_members.htm (accessed 31 July 2007).

businesses serving not only the prairies, but all of Canada as well.

To begin this survey of the airline industry in the Canadian West, a review of Canada's first national airway, Trans-Canada Airlines, is singularly appropriate, as much of the commercial air industry in the West evolved as a regional response to the Montréal headquartered national airline. Indeed, western Canadian airlines like Wardair were continually forced to navigate the Canadian Transport Committee's patently biased rulings (which favoured the national flag carrier) if they wished to survive and thrive in the air market.[118]

The airline that became Air Canada began transcontinental air service in the spring of 1939 and followed this with transatlantic air service in the summer of 1943.[119] When the end of the War came into sight, Trans Canada Airlines, as it was then known, began negotiating with the Canadian military for a transfer of aircrews from the military to the emergent airline. By 1946 TCA had recruited approximately 250 RCAF pilots (all trained through the BCATP and with wartime experience).[120] Not only did the airline require pilots, but ground crews and mechanics were also needed in large numbers as well. In the summer of 1945, TCA put in requests to the RCAF for one hundred aero mechanics and for twelve aeroframe technicians.[121]

In the period immediately after the War, TCA continued to hire ex-RCAF personnel, partially to comply with the Reinstatement in Civil Employment Act, which granted preferential hiring to returning veterans, and partially to expand the airline with highly skilled pilots, navigators and ground crews.[122] In addition, TCA took advantage of RCAF surplus aircraft to bolster its domestic route fleet, purchasing twenty-seven DC-3s to connect the larger urban

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[118] Max Ward has devoted an entire chapter of his memoirs to his interminable battles with the CTC and the Air Transport Committee. Max Ward. *The Max Ward Story: A Bush Pilot in the Bureaucratic Jungle.* Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1991. pp. 226-246.

[119] The initial transatlantic air service was established solely to deliver mail to troops serving in Europe, and utilized eight, freight-modified Lancaster bombers. John Blatherwick. *A History of Airlines in Canada.* Toronto: Unitrade Press, 1989. p. 16.

[120] *Ibid.*

[121] Telegram from H. L. Perry to W.K. Rutherford dated 29 August, 1945. National Archives of Canada. RG 24 Vol. 3325 File # 286-4-17 Vol. 2.

[122] Peter Pigott. *National Treasure: The History of Trans-Canada Airlines.* Madeira Park, B.C.: Harbour Publishing, 2001. p. 209.

centers of Edmonton, Calgary, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Saskatoon, Swift Current, Regina and Winnipeg with the rest of the country.[123]

Finally, the long dreamt-of modern transformation that was the dormant promise of the BCATP throughout the prairies was realized as small, isolated communities that had opened up to the world (or at least the Commonwealth) during the War now participated in that world through new access to airmail services and air travel provided by the regional network of feeder airlines. Eventually, TCA began operating non-stop flights connecting the larger western Canadian cities with international destinations in the United States, Europe and farther afield. Still, the nature of the national airline was one that many westerners believed served the East's needs first, and relegated the West to a subordinate position.

The belief that the Federal transportation policy and the Canadian transportation network, of which TCA was a part, benefited the East at the expense of the West's economic development was not new. With the region's absolute dependence on transportation to get crops to markets in the east and abroad, it is unsurprising that transportation has always been a central focus of western thinking, and since the building of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, western Canadians had felt that railway freight rates were at a level far above the cost of delivering such services and at a level above that existing in central Canada.[124] The results of these inequities were regional income disparities and a barrier to the development of a regional manufacturing sector.[125] The tremendous interwar aviation pioneering spirit seen in the west was an early response to this perceived barrier, and considering the continued regional grievances over rail rates it is perhaps unsurprising that such significant efforts in the air industry should continue in the West. The BCATP simply gave some entrepreneurs the skilled employees and assets necessary to commence western challenges to the eastern air transportation monopoly.

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[123] *Ibid.* p. 253.

[124] Kenneth Norrie. *Disparities and Interregional Adjustment.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986. p. 197.

[125] *Ibid.*

The first airline to challenge TCA was one of Canada's best known air efforts: Canadian Pacific Airlines. CP Air issued from a strong airline enterprise, its parent company, the CPR, had fostered prior to the Second World War. Perceptive enough to realize that the end of its vast Canadian Pacific Steamships empire was inherent in the new aviation technology, the CPR purchased a significant block of stock in Canadian Airways in 1930, and began regional flights in Eastern and Western Canada.[126] Additionally, during the war, the CPR operated six of the BCATP's ten Air Observer Schools and operated five engine repair plants for the overhaul of military aircraft and engines.[127]

In 1942, the CPR formed Canadian Pacific Airlines and immediately looked for international routes. Eventually, the airline established a network of routes dominating Canadian air traffic in the western United States, South America and the Pacific.[128] The airline ultimately offered prairie residents such flight opportunities as the Regina—Vancouver—Honolulu route, and a wide range of charters to the Caribbean and Europe.[129]

Following in the footsteps of TCA, CP Air purchased surplus military aircraft from the RCAF,[130] and keeping good relations with the RCAF and the Canadian Military, supported the construction of the Distant Early Warning Line in 1955.[131] The 1960s and '70s saw the airline convert completely to jet aircraft, and expanding even further—by the mid 1980's, CP Air rivalled Air Canada in market and assets.[132]

Although CP Air was the largest TCA/Air Canada competitor at this time, it was not the only large, successful airline to challenge the TCA monopoly. Again, issuing from the western provinces and with an even more defined link to the BCATP, Wardair would grow to become

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[126] Gordon R. McGregor. *The Adolescence of an Airline*. Montreal: Air Canada Promotional Distribution Centre, 1970. p. 29.
[127] Blatherwick. *A history of Airlines in Canada. Op. Cit.*, p. 42.
[128] McGregor. *Adolescence of an Airline. Op. Cit.*, p. 29.
[129] Blatherwick. *A history of Airlines in Canada. Op. Cit.*, p. 47.
[130] *Ibid.* 42.
[131] *Ibid.* p. 43.
[132] *Ibid.* pp. 48-49.

one of the largest Canadian air charter companies, and set new standards for professionalism and quality, onboard passenger service for the Canadian commercial air industry.

In 1945, Maxwell Ward, a young man from Edmonton who had been trained as an air force pilot at the BCATP schools at High River and Claresholm Alberta, and who had become a BCATP pilot instructor himself, was demobilized along with several thousand other air force personnel. Ward, like many released members, began a career as a bush pilot serving northern communities in Alberta and the Northwest Territories.[133] He began a business which served to connect the prairies with the rest of the country in a fashion that had never existed before. With thousands of young pilots, aircraft mechanics and navigators combing the west looking for employment, and the new airfields and facilities aiding this new link, the prairies were no longer remote from the power centres of the country, where, prior to the war a rail journey from Calgary to Ottawa would have taken five days, and where after the war, with the new air services, the distance was shortened to mere hours and the West was no longer an isolated area of the country.

Stepping into this important and transportationally undeveloped region, Ward founded Wardair in Yellowknife in 1952, and built-up his small airline to a point where, in June 1961 he opened up a new head office in Edmonton and licensed Wardair Canada Inc. as an international commercial charter airline.[134] If the BCATP had brought the world to the Canadian Prairies, Ward was determined to bring the prairies to the world through international commercial air charters.

As the new, international Wardair grew, Max Ward (like TCA's executives) took advantage of the post-war benefits offered by the RCAF. One of the airline's significant early purchases was four former RCAF Bristol freighters, acquired in 1967-68 which became part of

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[133] Ward. *The Max Ward Story. Op. Cit.*, p. 5.
[134] Ward. *The Max Ward Story. Op. Cit.*, p. 164.

Wardair's rapidly expanding fleet, a fleet which in 1966 became Canada's third to operate jet driven passenger aircraft.[135] Despite the Byzantine air regulations governing the air charter business, Wardair doggedly built up its portfolio of tour destinations to which it was permitted to fly, and by the close of the 1960's, offered Canadian's tours to Europe, Hawaii, Florida, South America and the Caribbean.[136]

As the 1970's progressed, Wardair purchased its first Boeing 747 aircraft and blossomed into Canada's largest commercial charter airline.[137] The 1980's saw the introduction of domestic charters to Wardair's destinations, and the airline's distinctive red, white and blue aircraft could be seen en route from Toronto to Calgary, Toronto to Edmonton, Vancouver to Montreal, Calgary to Montreal, Toronto to Halifax and Toronto to Regina and Saskatoon (all former BCATP bases except Halifax).[138] In the second half of the decade, Wardair was granted permission to operate schedule runs, and at last offered competitive, regular schedule domestic and international flights.[139]

Apart from CP Air and Wardair's national and international services, the Prairies were crisscrossed by smaller regional airlines. Pacific Western Airlines and Transair were two of the largest of these midsize air carriers, and they connected both the larger and smaller communities in the western provinces and territories as well as providing international charters. These smaller carriers, in conjunction with CP Air and Wardair, also formed the regional nucleus of the single largest airline that would rival Air Canada in years to come.

Pacific Western Airlines was created in 1953 at their headquarters in Calgary. By 1955, PWA had taken over the servicing contracts for the DEW line stations, and was building a

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[135] *Ibid.* 59. Previously the only Canadian air carriers to operate passenger jets were Air Canada and Canadian Pacific Airlines.

[136] Ward. *The Max Ward Story. Op. Cit.*, p. 202.

[137] Blatherwick. *A history of Airlines in Canada. Op. Cit.*, p. 60.

[138] *Ibid.*

[139] *Ibid.*

competitive bush operation.[140] PWA transformed into a full regional airline in 1958 servicing the western provinces and territories.[141] In 1974, the government of Alberta deemed the airline an essential transportation link for the province, and purchased 99.5 percent of its shares, indicating the extreme importance the carrier's routes held for the province.[142]

In 1977, PWA purchased seventy percent of Transair's stock, taking over the smaller airline. Transair, which was headquartered in Winnipeg, had been created in 1956 to service routes in Manitoba, western Ontario, Alberta, Saskatchewan and the territories.[143] The smaller airline had also serviced DEW line stations, and had become a vital link in Manitoba's civil aviation network. The takeover was finalized in late 1978, and the first pieces were in place for the largest airline merger in Canadian history—one that had tremendous impact on the western provinces and on the Canadian airline industry as a whole.[144]

The amalgamation of airlines that would result in the creation of Canadian Airlines International had begun with the Transair takeover, and by 1986, PWA's balance sheet was at such a point that the airline now made an offer on the much larger CP Air, and in December purchased all of that airline's assets for $300 million, while assuming an additional $700 million in debt.[145] In February of 1987 the newly amalgamated airline was revealed as Canadian Airlines International (CDN).[146] Headquartered in the Calgary offices of PWA, CDN had routes spanning the country, but still had a special emphasis in the West.

As the 1980s drew to a close, the competition that Air Canada and CDN offered the domestic market began to tell on Wardair's balance sheets. Wardair's consistent failure to attract business customers had meant a long slide toward insolvency. When the PWA corporation board

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[140] John Condit. *Wings Over the West: Russ Baker and the Rise of Pacific Western Airlines*. Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing. 1984. p. 121.

[141] *Ibid*. pp. 154-155.

[142] *Ibid*. p. 214.

[143] *Ibid*. pp. 220-224.

[144] Peter Pigott. *Wing Walkers: The Rise and Fall of Canada's Other Airline*. Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing. 1998. p. 297.

[145] *Ibid*. 301.

[146] *Ibid*. 304.

(still the parent of CDN) finally bought-out Wardair in January 1989, Max Ward's company was $400 million in debt and nearing default.[147] With this final purchase, the Canadian commercial air market was dominated by two airlines, one headquartered in the east, and (in the minds of many westerners) serving central Canadian interests; the other in the west, ostensibly continuing a legacy of dogged western response to perceived regional disparity.

From its creation in 1987 until 2001, Canadian Airlines was Canada's second largest airline carrying more than 11.9 million passengers to over 160 destinations in seventeen countries on five continents. Unfortunately, debt stricken Canadian Airlines (like all airlines everywhere) was ill prepared for the Persian Gulf War of 1991, the loss of passenger numbers and the tremendous hike in fuel prices that accompanied it.[148] The airline reeled under these blows, while simultaneously facing a massive Air Canada restructuring programme designed to put CDN out of business.[149] In 2000, CDN was more than $3.5 billion in debt, and with the Federal government refusing to bail them out, had no choice but to accept a phased merger with Air Canada. And so, the enduring western challenge to Air Canada that had been taken up on the Prairie's BCAT airfields, disappeared on January 1, 2002 with the resolution of several mundane court rulings concerning collective bargaining.[150]

Although the final departure of Canadian Airlines marked the end of a great challenge to eastern Canadian aviation, a challenge built strongly on the foundations of the BCATP, it was not the end of the Plan's impact on the prairies. Indeed, clear echoes of the Plan and its enduring influence can be observed in a host of prairie communities and their residents, and by government and military programmes that continue to utilize the airfields and infrastructure the Plan brought to the western provinces.

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[147] Ward. *The Max Ward Story. Op. Cit.,* p. 311.
[148] Pigott. *Wing Walkers. Op. Cit.,* pp. 314-315.
[149] *Ibid.* 317.
[150] *Ibid.* p. 389- 394.

CONCLUSIONS

The remarkable transformations wrought by the BCATP on the prairie provinces are made even more apparent when the brief life span of the Plan is considered. In just over four years from inception to termination, the Plan poured nearly one billion dollars into a region reeling from economic depression and agricultural disaster (indeed, Saskatchewan's economy was so devastated that it had a gross value of production in 1933 of only $161,805,633.00).[151] Along with the end of the depression, the Plan saw thirty-six airfields constructed in the prairies, complete with air traffic control towers, hangars, support buildings and enough infrastructure to provide a massive leg up in the postwar aviation world, providing for Canada's emergence as a leading aviation nation. Prairie communities experienced housing booms and sweeping modernizations that moved the region onto a more equal footing with the urbanized eastern provinces. Tens of thousands of students and instructional staff lived and worked in small prairie towns, hundreds of marriages and returned immigrant airmen infused new blood into old farming communities.

As the foundation for much of Canada's postwar aviation industry, the BCATP provided the structure and skills necessary for the country to emerge as a major aviation nation in the postwar air world. Although Canada was developing an air industry before 1939, it is clear that the massive boost the Plan entailed put the nation farther ahead in terms of air travel and commerce than otherwise would have been the case. This modernization of the region's (and nation's) vast industrial capacity also contributed to the process of urbanization that had begun prior to the depression, and which had accelerated with the onset of war.

In the years before the War, more than sixty-three percent of the population of the three

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[151] The gross value of production measures the actual value of the total production output of a region or country. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. General Statistics Branch. *The Canada Year Book: 1936.* Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude, 1936.

prairie provinces lived in rural areas, and although the process of urbanization had begun well before the outbreak of war, current figures show that more than seventy-five percent of the population now live in urban areas.[152] The BCATP cannot take credit for making this urban shift happen, as huge economic factors like the Leduc, Alberta oil discovery in early 1947 are more directly connected to the massive demographic swing, but the Plan contributed significantly by facilitating this shift, as it provided the means to draw industry and population into the region, and help make urban areas more attractive to prairie residents.

Certainly, the BCATP reaffirmed the urban hierarchy that the railway had put in place upon its arrival sixty years before. As with the CPR's decision to locate rail hubs and supply depots, BCATP site selection indicated which prairie communities were to be ranked higher than others. With the CPR, towns selected as divisional centres quickly assumed positions of economic prominence and "formed western Canada's upper urban echelon."[153] With the BCATP, these towns and cities had their pre-eminent position reinforced, and their perceived status as modern communities with a bright future increased along with their economies. For some this boost did not long outlast the war, but for many BCATP communities the wartime economic impetus set them on the path toward sustained economic success and growth in the postwar period.

Part of the region's exceptional growth has been due to the Plan's alumni. Thomas Dent, the young RAF Flight Lieutenant who trained as a navigator, and who returned to live in the prairies after the war, flourished in his adopted home. In the years after the War, Dent worked for the Alberta Wheat Pool and as the Quartermaster for the South Alberta Light Horse Regiment.[154] Eventually, Dent became a civil servant and the Director: Local Employment

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[152] Statistics Canada. *A National Overview*. Ottawa: Industry Canada, 2002. 2001 Census of Canada. Catalogue number 93-360-XPB. pp. 227, 229, 236.

[153] Max Foran. *The CPR West: The Iron Road and the Making of a Nation*. Ed. Hugh A. Dempsey. Toronto: Douglas and MCIntyre, 1984. p. 96.

[154] Dent, interview.

Development Programs before retiring in 1984 and eventually serving as the Special Advisor to the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lloyd Axworthy.[155] Dent's important contributions both to the Prairie Provinces and to Canada as a whole are uniquely typical of the men who encountered the western provinces through the BCATP, relocated, and became vital citizens like fire chiefs, engineers and civil servants. The fact that, as Dent recalls, "thousands returned to Canada" underscores the tremendous impact these men, and through them the BCATP, had on the demographic, cultural and economic development of the postwar prairie provinces as they infused the region with new ideas and dynamism as they built new lives in their chosen home.[156]

Like the men who trained with the BCATP, the women who served in the RCAF (WD) were important participants in the prairies' revolutionary postwar development. It is not surprising that the Air Force, with its tremendous presence on the prairies, held a strong lure for the thousands of prairie women who enlisted in the WDs, and the women who enlisted in the air force not only contributed to the immediate transformation of accepted gender roles through their willingness to serve in uniform, but also gained the confidence, education, training and organizational experience necessary for the significant successes of the postwar prairie feminist movement. The RCAF, as the first military arm to accept women, was arguably the most progressive, and provided its airwomen with social and economic opportunities unavailable to the average prairie woman, perhaps the most important of which was the chance to escape (even if only temporarily for some) the confines of the prairie farm and experience the "new horizons" promised by recruiters.

The BCATP established the precedent and the foundation for the NATO Air training Plan that prepared pilots for the air war in Korea and a contemporary version of the programme still exists. Called NATO Flying Training in Canada (NFTC) this new programme operates

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[155] *Ibid.*
[156] *Ibid.*

largely in the western provinces continuing the BCATP legacy. Operating from four locations: one administrative in Ontario, and operationally from 419 Tactical Fighter Training Squadron (419 TFTS) at Cold Lake, Alberta and at 2 Canadian Forces Flying Training School (2 CFFTS) at Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan as well as at the former Canadian Forces base at Portage La Prairie, Manitoba (the latter being two of the original BCATP school sites), NFTC promises to produce "a highly qualified jet pilot optimally prepared to become combat-ready on any latest generation fighter aircraft in minimum time . . .."[157] NFTC trains pilots from a host of NATO nations including Italy, Denmark, Great Britain, Sweden, France, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Singapore and the non-NATO country of the United Arab Emirates, continuing the BCATP legacy of introducing foreign air crew trainees to the people of the prairie provinces.[158] In addition to this successful international aviation programme, the Canadian Air Force presence in the prairies remains strong, with Canada's largest fighter base located at 4 Wing Cold Lake, Alberta, and a number of other air force bases in all three provinces.

With the prairie skies still filled with aircraft, the aeronautics industry in the region continues to thrive. In 1997, Winnipeg's Bristol Aerospace was acquired by Magellan Aerospace Corporation.[159] The company, which was busy throughout the Cold War developing and maintaining military and civilian aircraft, has expanded into the space sciences with the design and construction of the SCISAT ozone monitoring satellite for the Canadian Space Agency.[160] The company has also branched into the military air weapons market with the highly successful CRV7 missile system used extensively by the British military.[161]

While it is in aviation and in the military's presence that the BCATP's presence is most

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[157] *NATO Flying Training Centre: Military Flying Training in Canada.* "Program Concept." http://www.nftc.net/nftc/en/flash/nftc.jsp (accessed 31 July 2007).

[158] *Ibid.*

[159] *Magellan Aerospace Corporation, Bristol Aerospace Limited.* "Company History." http://www.bristol.ca/History.html (accessed 31 July 2007).

[160] Army Technology.Com. The Website for the Defence Industries—Army. "British Army Longbow Apaches are Equipped with CRV7 70mm Rocket Systems." http://www.army-technology.com/projects/apache/apache8.html (accessed 31 July 2007).

[161] *Ibid.*

palpable today, it is not just in the skies that the Plan can still be observed. In the small communities that hosted a school, hundreds of the surplus buildings became community halls, ice rinks, housing, and business structures, and many still serve in those capacities.[162] As for the airfields at the heart of the Plan, twenty-six of the thirty-six primary airfields built to train the Commonwealth air crews are still operating in some capacity, although many of those are now reduced to single runways with few facilities, and cater solely to one or two seat private aircraft.[163] Certainly the promise the Plan's airfields offered held true for the larger of the prairie communities, but even in the smaller ones, a local airport is an important boost to the economy through industry and tourism.

Although the West's postwar aviation challenges to Air Canada's monopoly disappeared with the merger between Canadian Airlines and Air Canada, the audacity of such western aviation entrepreneurs like Maxwell Ward is still seen in the guise of the newest, western regional air service, West Jet. Founded in 1996, West Jet flies to thirty-five North American destinations from its headquarters in Calgary, Alberta, but still keeps the prairies linked through its commuter flights. West Jet, like CP Air, PWA and Ward Air before it is still connecting western Canada with the rest of the world.

Like the earliest post war challenges to Air Canada, The Plan that left such an enormous legacy on the western provinces has been consigned to history, and is forgotten by many. The vast impact it had on the small towns of the West, and the changes it wrought on their populations is largely a footnote, as scholars tend to focus on the scope and military impact of the Plan, while ignoring its more immediate influences in western Canada. Even the official memorial to the BCATP is in Ontario, far from the location of so many of its EFTS and SFTS.

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[162] Commonwealth Air Training Plan Museum. "History of the Creation of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan." http://www.airmuseum.ca/bcatp.html (accessed 31 July 2007).

[163] For a complete listing of all operational Canadian civilian and military airfields and their services, consult the current Department of National Defence publication, *Canada Flight Supplement* published by NAV Canada.

Still, as a mark of the BCATP's importance to the Canadian prairies, the official museum of the BCATP is located on the former site of #12 SFTS Brandon, Manitoba. The museum offers visitors the opportunity to experience the enormity and importance of a program that did so much for the Allied war effort, and which brought so much to their out-of-the-way districts. Hopefully, it also affords a chance to understand that although the Plan has gone largely unnoticed, it was one of the most important influences shaping the new west that emerged in the decade following the Second World War and continues to influence it today.

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APPENDIX I

BRITISH COMMONWEALTH AIR TRAINING PLAN SCHOOLS IN MANITOBA, SASKATCHEWAN AND ALBERTA

Training Command Headquarters

Name	Location
No. 2 THQ	Winnipeg, Manitoba
No. 4 THQ	Regina, Saskatchewan (April 1940-October 1941)
No. 4 THQ	Calgary, Alberta (October 1941-November 1944)

Elementary Flying Training Schools (All EFTS marked by * were RAF Units)

Name	Location	Dates of Operation
No. 5 EFTS	Lethbridge, Alberta	07/22/40- 06/01/41 Moved to
No. 5 EFTS	High River, Alberta	06/01/41- 11/15/44
No. 6 EFTS	Prince Albert, Saskatchewan	07/22/40- 11/15/44
No. 14 EFTS	Portage La Prairie, Manitoba	10/28/40- 07/03/42
No. 15 EFTS	Regina, Saskatchewan	11/11/40- 08/11/44
No. 16 EFTS	Edmonton, Alberta	11/11/40- 07/12/42
No. 19 EFTS	Virden, Manitoba	05/16/41- 12/15/44
No. 23 EFTS	Davidson, Saskatchewan	11/09/42- 01/02/45 Moved to

No. 23 EFTS	Yorkton, Saskatchewan	01/02/45- 09/15/45
No. 25 EFTS	Assiniboia, Saskatchewan	01/30/44- 07/28/44
No. 26 EFTS	Neepawa, Manitoba	01/30/44- 08/24/44
No. 31 EFTS	De Winton, Alberta	06/18/41- 09/25/44
No. 32 EFTS	Bowden, Alberta	07/12/41- 09/08/44
No. 33 EFTS*	Caron, Saskatchewan	01/05/42- 01/14/44
No. 34 EFTS*	Assiniboia, Saskatchewan	02/11/42- 01/30/44
No. 35 EFTS	Neepawa, Manitoba	03/30/42- 01/30/44
No. 36 EFTS	Pearce, Alberta	03/30/42- 08/14/42

Service Flying Training Schools (All SFTS marked by * were RAF Units)

Name	Location	Dates of Operation
No 3. SFTS	Calgary, Alberta	10/28/40- 09/28/45
No. 4 SFTS	Saskatoon, Saskatchewan	09/16/40- 03/30/45
No. 7 SFTS	Fort Macleod, Alberta	12/09/40- 11/17/44
No. 8 SFTS	Weyburn, Saskatchewan	01/02/44- 06/30/44
No. 10 SFTS	Dauphin, Manitoba	03/05/41- 04/14/45
No. 11 SFTS	Yorkton, Saskatchewan	04/10/41- 12/01/44

No. 12 SFTS	Brandon, Manitoba	05/16/41- 03/30/45
No 13 SFTS	North Battleford, Saskatchewan	02/01/44- 03/30/45
No. 15 SFTS	Claresholm, Alberta	06/09/41- 03/30/45
No. 17 SFTS	Souris, Manitoba	03/08/43- 03/30/45
No. 18 SFTS	Gimli, Manitoba	09/06/43- 03/30/45
No. 19 SFTS	Vulcan, Alberta	05/03/43- 04/14/45
No. 32 SFTS*	Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan	12/09/40- 10/17/44
No. 33 SFTS*	Carberry, Manitoba	12/26/40- 11/17/44
No. 34 SFTS*	Medicine Hat, Alberta	04/18/41- 11/17/44
No. 35 SFTS*	North Battleford, Saskatchewan	09/04/41- 02/25/45
No. 36 SFTS*	Penhold, Alberta	09/28/41- 02/25/44
No. 37 SFTS*	Calgary, Alberta	10/22/41- 03/10/44
No. 38 SFTS*	Estevan, Saskatchewan	04/27/42- 02/11/44
No. 39 SFTS*	Swift Current, Saskatchewan	12/15/41- 03/24/44
No 41 SFTS*	Weyburn, Saskatchewan	01/05/42- 01/22/44

Flight Instructor Schools

Name	Location	Dates of Operation
#2 FIS	Vulcan, Alberta	03/08/42- 03/05/43 Moved to
#2 FIS	Pearce, Alberta	03/05/43- 20/01/45

Air Navigation Schools

Name	Location	Dates of Operation
Central Navigation School	Rivers, Manitoba	05/11/42- 09/15/45

Air Observer Schools

Name	Location	Dates of Operation
No. 2 AOS	Edmonton, Alberta	08/05/40- 07/14/44
No. 3 AOS	Regina, Saskatchewan	09/16/40- 09/01/42 Moved to
No. 3 AOS	Pearce, Alberta	09/01/42- 06/06/43
No. 5 AOS	Winnipeg, Manitoba	01/06/41- 04/30/45
No. 6 AOS	Prince Albert, Saskatchewan	03/17/41- 11/11/42
No. 7 AOS	Portage La Prairie, Manitoba	04/28/41- 03/31/45

Wireless Schools

Name	Location	Dates of Operation
No. 2 WS	Calgary, Alberta	09/16/40- 04/14/45
No. 3 WS	Winnipeg, Manitoba	02/17/41- 01/20/45

Bombing and Gunnery Schools

Name	Location	Dates of Operation
No. 2 B&GS	Mossbank, Saskatchewan	10/28/40-12/15/44
No 3 B&GS	MacDonald, Manitoba	03/10/41-02/17/45
No. 5 B&GS	Dafoe, Saskatchewan	04/26/41-02/17/45
No. 7 B&GS	Paulson, Manitoba	06/23/41-02/02/45
No. 8 B&GS	Lethbridge, Alberta	10/13/41-12/15/44

Initial Training Schools

Name	Location
No. 2 ITS	Regina, Saskatchewan
No. 4 ITS	Edmonton, Alberta
No. 7 ITS	Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Manning Depots

Name	Location	
No. 2 MD	Brandon, Manitoba	(29 April 1940-May 1944)
No. 2 MD	Swift Current, Saskatchewan	(May 1944-November 1944)
No. 3 MD	Edmonton, Alberta	

Equipment Depots

Name	Location
No. 7 ED	Winnipeg, Manitoba
No. 11 ED	Calgary, Alberta

Repair Depots

Name	Location
No. 8 RD	Winnipeg, Manitoba
No. 10 RD	Calgary, Alberta

APPENDIX II

ETHICS BOARD CERTIFICATE FOR RESEARCH

INVOLVING HUMANS

The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - FULL BOARD

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT:	UBC BREB NUMBER:
David Breen	UBC/Arts/History	H06-03502

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:

Institution	Site
N/A	N/A

Other locations where the research will be conducted:
Interviews will be by questionnaire posted to the individual's home, or by e-mail, or by telephone.

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):
N/A

SPONSORING AGENCIES:
N/A

PROJECT TITLE:
The Political, Economic and Social Legacies of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in Canada's Prairie Provinces: 1939-Today

REB MEETING DATE:	CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE:
January 25, 2007	January 25, 2008

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL: **DATE APPROVED: March 9, 2007**

Document Name	Version	Date
Consent Forms:		
February 17th Revised Version of Consent Form	4.5	February 17, 2007
Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:		
BCATP Questionnaire	Version 2	November 1, 2006
Letter of Initial Contact:		
February 17th Revised Contect Letter	4	February 17, 2007

The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:

Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
Dr. Arminee Kazanjian, Associate Chair
Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Associate Chair