



THROUGH ADVERSITY AND MORE: LOOKING AHEAD TOWARDS THE CANADIAN CENTENNIAL OF FLIGHT

By Lieutenant Steven Dieter

The year 2009 marks the 100th anniversary of the first powered, heavier-than-air, controlled flight in Canada by J.A.D. McCurdy in the Silver Dart.

Very few nations in the world owe more to flight than Canada. Aviation opened up the country and remains a lifeline to many remote and northern areas. The significance of aviation today and what it has done for Canada can

be compared to what the Canadian Pacific Railway did for Canada in the years after Confederation. Today, aerospace activity makes



Flight of the Silver Dart aircraft of the Aerial Experimental Association, piloted by Douglas McCurdy
DND/Library and Archives Canada



Aviation pioneer J.A.D. McCurdy at the controls of the AEA Silver Dart
DND/Library and Archives Canada

up a larger component of our industrial base than any other nation.

The history of military aviation in Canada goes back to Petawawa in August 1909, when the first military flight in Canada took place involving the Silver Dart. It would be another six months before a member of the military would participate in a flight as a passenger. While official interest in military air power waned, Canadians were captivated.

As war became a reality in 1914, thousands of Canadians enlisted for military service. The history of the Air Force runs rampant with the achievements of Canadians who joined the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service during the First World War, most of whom transferred from the Canadian Expeditionary Force. There were those, such as Billy Bishop, Ray Collishaw and Billy Barker, who earned their reputations in the air. However, others, such as Prime Minister Lester Pearson and National Hockey League builder Conn Smythe, would become much more renowned after the war. Canada became a bastion for training, as pilots were trained at the newly established Camp Borden.



Camp Borden 1914

Dept. of National Defence/Library and Archives Canada

Efforts to create a Canadian Air Force were started in 1918, but it would take six years before the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) was officially created on 1 April 1924. However, the newly created RCAF was not only responsible for military aviation but was also responsible for civilian aviation until the mid-1930s. Matters such as photography and

forestry operations along with the control of civil aviation (including issuing civilian pilot licenses) helped to give the RCAF a *raison d'être* during the Great Depression, when the budgets of all three services were being cut back.



Signing of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan agreement

Walter J. Turnbull / Library and Archives Canada / C-024696

When Canada entered the Second World War a proposal to train aircrew was made by Prime Minister Mackenzie King in 1939. As a result, Canada became the home of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan which prepared pilots and aircrew from all over the world for combat. Canadian pilots took part in the Battle of Britain to defend the skies over England against German aerial attack. As more Canadians became qualified as aircrew and departed for the European theatre of operations, more squadrons were created to accommodate them. In 1943 the number of Canadian bomber squadrons allowed for the creation of Number 6 Bomber Group which was one of Bomber Command's most successful formations. The Air Force continued to play a role on the world stage after the Second World War. Pilots served with American fighter squadrons in the Korean conflict. As a part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, members of the Air Force team were posted to air bases in Europe to help defend the Western world. When the risk of attack was felt to be closer to home, North American Aerospace Defense Command—an alliance which continues to this day—was formed.

With the formation of Air Command in 1975, the Air Force has contributed to the defence

of Canadian values and humanitarian efforts at home and abroad. The efforts of the Air Force have contributed to operations around the globe—the First Gulf War, Bosnia, Kosovo and numerous peacekeeping operations. Civil-military cooperation is visible with many search and rescue operations, as the Air Force works with the Canadian Coast Guard and civilian agencies to save lives. The Air Force works with the Navy to protect the maritime approaches on our coasts and the Army on key tactical operations. Our CF18 fighters scrambled on 11 September 2001 as part of the effort to protect the skies against terrorism and to ensure the safe landing of countless aircraft diverted to Canadian airspace—and Canadian soil—as a result of attacks upon the United States.



A servicing technician directs the pilot of a visiting CF18 Hornet jet fighter to a temporary hangar after a routine flight over the Atlantic coast. This Hornet, from 425 Tactical Fighter Squadron at 3 Wing Bagotville, is one of six brought to 14 Wing Greenwood after the terrorist attacks of September 11, when NORAD increased air patrols in the region.

Photo by Sgt Dennis Mah, DGP/MJ5PA Combat Camera

Members of the Air Force have answered the call to serve, in peace and in war. Aircrew, ground crew and support personnel have defended the skies of the world and have striven to increase the influence and impact of aviation. They have literally gone Through Adversity to the Stars—and beyond. The Air Force has been a proud part of this tradition since nearly the beginning, and the future is looking bigger and brighter than ever.

All Canadian Forces members, their families and friends are encouraged to participate in the celebrations and activities that will occur in 2009. Whether it is humanitarian efforts, search and rescue, tactical aviation or maritime support, the roles and influences of the Air

Force are felt through all elements of the Canadian Forces as well as in civilian matters. The Department of National Defence, as represented by the Air Force, is one of 17 member organizations for the Canadian Centennial of Flight Project.

At the national level, the Canadian Centennial of Flight Project was envisioned as a way to provide support to Canadians who want to make the 100th Anniversary of the first flight in Canada an opportunity to celebrate. Celebrations will include not only the historical event of 23 February 1909, when the Silver Dart took flight, but also Canadian accomplishments (both home and abroad) in civilian and military aviation in the decades since then.

Canadian Centennial of Flight celebrations will encompass the history of aviation and space activities, the education of youth, the technological and commercial aspects of aerospace development and careers and, most of all, will connect with Canadians. Many of the activities will highlight achievements of the past 100 years and will increase Canadians' understanding of the importance of aviation and space endeavours to their country.



The Golden Hawks aerobatic team was formed in 1959 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of powered flight in Canada as well as the 35th anniversary of the RCAF. Initially established for one year, the Golden Hawks gave 317 shows and were finally disbanded in 1963 after their last performance in Montreal, Quebec

CF Photo

For example, the Royal Canadian Mint will strike a commemorative coin to help mark the Centennial. Canada Post will release a postage stamp in February to coincide with the celebrations that will take place in Baddeck,

Nova Scotia. Communities and businesses across the country—large and small, military and civilian—will let Canadians know all about the Centennial of Flight through special events. In 2009, the Snowbirds will be accompanied by “Hawk One”—a restored F86 Sabre painted in the colours of the RCAF Golden Hawks air demonstration team. This is just a short list of activities planned for 2009. Plan an event and share the information with Canadians through the Centennial of Flight website.

While the first flight took place on that cold February 23rd in 1909 at Baddeck, Nova Scotia, the Centennial of Flight Project will be coordinating a year-long commemoration with many exciting and educational activities planned from coast to coast to coast.

Visit our website at
www.airforce.canadiancentennialofflight.ca ■

Lieutenant Steven Dieter is a Public Affairs Officer in training. He is currently gaining on the job experience with the Directorate of Air Public Affairs at National Defence Headquarters, where he has been tasked to the Centennial of Flight Project. He is an Associate Air Force Historian with the Office of Air Force Heritage and History and a former historian of the Billy Bishop Museum in his hometown of Owen Sound, Ontario.

Canadian Centennial of Flight Project

Member Organizations:

- Aerospace Industries Association of Canada
- Air Cadet League of Canada
- Air Force Association of Canada
- Air Transport Association of Canada
- Canada Aviation Museum
- Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame
- Canadian Aeronautical Preservation Association
- Canadian Aeronautics and Space Institute
- Canadian Airports Council
- Canadian Aviation Historical Society
- Canadian Aviation Maintenance Council
- Canadian Business Aviation Association
- Canadian Owners and Pilots Association
- Department of National Defence
- NAV CANADA
- Silver Dart Centennial Association
- Vintage Wings of Canada

