

CANADA

AIR FORCE TRADITIONS

(Reprint from the *Roundel* Vol. 1, No. 8, April 1994)

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With the 70th Anniversary of the formation of the Royal Canadian Air Force [RCAF] now upon us, we should take a few moments to reflect on our heritage and history. Part of our heritage are the various symbols (such as the roundel, the ensign, etc.) that have come to be associated with the air force. With this in mind, what follows is a brief examination of a few of these symbols and “from whence they came”.



RCAF MARCH PAST:

The original score of the March Past was the work of Sir Walford Davies, and combined the rhythm of the old Royal Flying Corps [RFC] call with that of the Royal Naval Air Service call. The call appears as the introduction to the March Past and in the coda. The second part of the March Past was composed by Sir George Dyson. Alterations to the tune included a rearrangement of the rhythm to make it easier to march to. In February, 1943, authority was granted by His Majesty's Stationary Office to publish the tune in Canada under the title "RCAF March Past". In the early 1950's a special pipe band arrangement was composed by RCAF Pipe Major A. R. Howie, then a member of the CFB [Canadian Forces Base] Trenton Pipe Band.

AIR FORCE BLUE:

Blue uniforms were officially adopted for wear by members of the Royal Air Force in March 1918. Rumour attributes the adoption of blue uniforms to the Russian debacle of 1917. The Russians had ordered vast

quantities of blue cloth for their cavalry. A million yards of it lay in British warehouses undelivered. It was unsuitable for dying either khaki or navy blue, so it was appropriated for air force uniforms. The blue uniforms first made an appearance in October 1919 and since then have been adopted by a large number of nations.

THE ENSIGN:

By tradition, the Admiralty in England had the right to veto the introduction of any new flag adopted for use on land or sea within the British Territories. Therefore, several of the original designs for an air force ensign introduced in the 1920s were rejected by the Royal Navy.

Preferring not to be continuously thwarted by the navy, Lord Trenchard, the Chief of the Air Staff for the RAF [Royal Air Force], presented the air force ensign, in its (*sic*) present form, to King George V. The King approved the design and the Admiralty, although far from happy with the design, had no option but to approve the ensign since the King had already given his approval. In 1940 the ensign, incorporating the RCAF maple leaf roundel, was approved as the RCAF ensign. Officially, the ensign was to be flown only from a fixed flagstaff. Despite this regulation the ensign appeared often on parade. Traditionally, only "colours" not ensigns, should be paraded.

THE ROUNDEL:

The first Royal Flying Corps aircraft carried no national markings until the end of August, 1914, when Union Jacks were painted on the under surface of lower wings. At a distance the Union Flag was easily confused with the Iron Cross insignia of the Germans. In October 1914, the British adopted the concentric circular "target" introduced by the French, but the colours were reversed. Adoption of the RCAF roundel with a maple leaf as





the central device was authorized during the Second World War, but the new design did not appear as aircraft markings for Canadian machines until after the war ended.

PER ARDUA AD ASTRA:

It was used for many centuries as the motto of the Irish family of Mulvany, and that family understands the motto to mean “Through difficulties to the Stars”. King George V approved “Per Ardua Ad Astra” as the official motto of the RFC on 15 March 1913. It was accepted as a motto without meaning. The College of Arms confirms that “no authoritative translation is possible” - let everyone translate it as they think fit.



SIC ITUR AD ASTRA:

Originally adopted as the motto for the Canadian Air Force in 1918, it can be translated as “Such is the Pathway to the Stars”. With the subsequent downsizing of the organization and the birth of the RCAF, the motto was dropped in favour of “Per Ardua Ad Astra”. With the formation of Air Command in 1976, the motto was reinstated for the air force. 🇨🇦

ABBREVIATIONS

- RAF Royal Air Force
- RCAF Royal Canadian Air Force
- RFC Royal Flying Corps