

ROYAL MATTERS:

Symbolism, History and the Significance of
the RCAF's Name Change, 1909–2011

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Defence Minister Peter MacKay (centre), and LGen André Deschamps (left), Commander RCAF, present F/Sgt (ret'd) Michael Nash Kelly with the historical ensign of the Royal Canadian Air Force during the announcement of the restoration of the RCN, CA and RCAF's. Photo: Col Dan Bard

On the morning of 16 August 2011, Minister of National Defence Peter MacKay announced that the air, sea, and land environments of the Canadian Forces (CF) would once again be known as the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and Canadian Army. Reaction to this change within the new RCAF has been positive, yet there are undoubtedly members who are curious about the significance of a “Royal” prefix that has not applied to the Air Force in over 44 years.

Such attitudes are understandable, as there have been many generational changes between the RCAF that was disbanded in 1968 and the one that exists today. As a result, current members of what has been light-heartedly (yet accurately) labelled “RCAF 2.0”¹ may be surprised to learn that they have more in common than they realized with the airmen who first requested the Royal prefix

for the Canadian Air Force almost nine decades ago. The aim of this article, therefore, is to explain why the embryonic Canadian Air Force (CAF) of the 1920s wanted the Royal designation and why this story is important to the modern RCAF and its sense of identity.

The CAF that existed between 1920 and 1 April 1924 was a much different entity

compared to the one that would follow it. Unlike the RCAF, the CAF was a small, non-permanent and non-professional force that acted more like an air militia than an actual air force. Reporting to the civilian Air Board, which was established in 1919 to “super-vice all matters connected with aeronautics,” the CAF that was created in February 1920 consisted mostly of former wartime pilots who took a 28-day refresher course every two years.² Yet as the official history of the RCAF observed, this set-up was an “ingenious and pragmatic solution to a perplexing dilemma”³ that was rooted in problems that were uniquely Canadian:

Any Canadian air force at this time had to be many things to many people: economical yet efficient, unobtrusive yet effective, unmilitaristic yet military A non-permanent militia organization, solidly in the Canadian tradition, would enable the government to skirt the tough political, strategic, and technological obstacles that inhibited the immediate development of military air power.⁴

Policy aimed at the realities of national requirements was certainly one factor that gave this particular air force a Canadian character, but so too did other more observable aspects, such as its unique motto *Sic Itur Ad Astra* (such is the pathway to the stars) as well as a distinctive uniform and maple leaf adorned badges.⁵ The key question, therefore, is why would this national organization abandon symbols that emphasized its Canadian identity in favour of characteristics that some have argued turned it into “a faithful colonial replica” of the Royal Air Force (RAF)?⁶ To answer that question it is first necessary to understand what tradition and customs mean and why they are important to military organizations like the RCAF and their sense of identity.

There are many definitions for these terms, but according to one reliable authority on Canadian military heritage, E. C. Russell, customs are the “long established, continuing practice or observance, considered as an unwritten rule, and dependent for its continued reality and usage on long consent of a community.” Tradition, on the other hand, is “a process of handing down, or passing from one to another knowledge, beliefs, feelings ways of thinking, manners, codes of behaviour, a philosophy of life, or faith without written instructions.”⁷ Yet another key source, the Directorate of History and Heritage, ties these two important strands together by observing that, when “combined with historical knowledge,” customs and traditions create heritage.⁸ All of these elements are essential factors to the operational effectiveness of any military organization, particularly since an understanding of history and heritage is key to the development of esprit de corps, teamwork, and discipline. Each plays its own role. For instance, tradition often employs unique symbols—such as badges, uniforms, flags, mottos, and music—to help members identify with their particular service as well as build pride and a sense of cohesion; all essential characteristics without which military units cannot survive.⁹ Likewise, history relies on the power of the collective narrative and shared experiences to bond members together. By doing so, it can also be used as a lessons learned tool to help guide present and future policy by teaching present members about their successors’ achievements and even failures. It can serve further to improve operational effectiveness and maintain professionalism within the military, as past experiences are some of the best means “to set standards against which to measure future conduct.”¹⁰ More specifically, however, history forms the basis of institutional identity and culture, which is why it is a good starting point to explain how problems with professionalism, permanency, coherence, and efficiency all led the RCAF to adopt the Royal prefix as well as other British symbols in the early 1920s.

The roots of Canadian military aviation are generally traced to J. A. D. McCurdy's first flight on 23 February 1909 at Baddeck, Nova Scotia, and, more importantly, a follow-up demonstration at the militia's summer camp in Petawawa, Ontario, five months later. This latter test was specifically designed to show the military potential of aircraft. Unfortunately, the militia observers concluded that aircraft were "too expensive a luxury" for a cash starved Canadian military. It was a theme that would become all too common throughout the RCAF's history.¹¹ Although the First World War modified this view, the next attempt to create a Canadian air service was as unsuccessful as the first. The problem this time was that its founder, E. L. Janney, was a reputed "confidence trickster." Putting those skills to full use, Janney managed to convince the colourful Minister of Militia and Defence, Sir Sam Hughes, of the need to create the Canadian Aviation Corps (CAC) in 1914. While his goal was certainly admirable, it was Janney's method of achieving that aim that was questionable. Elaborate requests for money, dubious tours of Royal Flying Corps (RFC) stations, and frequent absences without leave resulted in a quick end to the CAC along with its three members and single aircraft.¹²

Despite this unfortunate start for the creation of a national air force, Canadians did distinguish themselves in the air during the First World War. Serving with the RFC and Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS), which, in turn, were both consolidated into the RAF in 1918, Canadian airmen saw action from the English Channel to the Indian Ocean as well as from the skies over Western Europe to the Middle East and even Africa. They flew in fighters, bombers, and seaplanes, and they had a reputation of being some of the best airmen in the war. Indeed, statistics clearly bear this out. At times accounting for 35 per cent of the RFC's total strength, 22,812 Canadians served with the RFC, RNAS, and, eventually, the RAF. Over 800

decorations, including three Victoria Crosses (the highest award for bravery) were issued to Canadian airmen; roughly 1,500 would make the most supreme sacrifice.¹³

While the CAC may have proven something of a nightmare, the dream of a purely Canadian air force again materialized toward the end of the First World War. National pride in the achievements of Canadian airmen and the desire to forge a unique identity were constant themes among the Toronto press, with one report going so far as to claim that the time had come to form an independent service, particularly since in their view the Canadians in the RFC and RNAS were superior to their British counterparts.¹⁴ Toronto newspapers were not the only ones chomping at the bit for the creation of a Canadian Air Force, or at least all-Canadian squadrons within the RFC. After a trip to the United Kingdom in spring 1917, Prime Minister Robert Borden found that the British were failing to appreciate Canada's contribution to the air war. So much so, in fact, that he complained how:

Canadians in Flying Service are not receiving adequate recognition. There seems to have been a disposition from the first to assign them subordinate positions and to sink their identity. They were forbidden to wear any distinguishing badge to indicate that they were Canadians. ... The question of establishing a Canadian Flying Corps demands immediate ... consideration ... I am inclined to believe that the time for organizing an independent Canadian Air Service has come ...¹⁵

This represented a considerable reversal from earlier government policy. In 1915, the War Office actually invited the Dominions

to create their own squadrons for service in the RFC; an offer which was rejected by the Canadian government on the grounds that air units were an imperial, or more precisely, British, concern. Things had clearly changed by 1918 as the outstanding contributions made by Canadian airmen resulted in a greater desire to recognize the nation's role in the air war. The first changes were small but, nevertheless, significant to the development of a Canadian air identity. Some Canadians serving in what was now the RAF were allowed to stitch "Canada" flashes on their shoulders, while others mentioned in certain types of correspondence had a bracketed "C" after their name.¹⁶ Bigger changes followed, such as the actual formation of an all-Canadian wing.

The wing itself, which sometimes appeared in official correspondence as the "Canadian Royal Air Force" or "Royal Air Force, Canadian,"¹⁷ became operational nine days after the First World War had ended. Now under the command of Colonel R. Leckie, this embryonic Canadian Air Force continued training throughout the rest of 1918 and early into 1919 with the belief that it would grow into a peacetime force back in Canada. It certainly had a solid foundation from which to expand, as it not only had received 100 British aircraft (the same gift was given to all the Dominions to start their own air forces) but also had combat-trained pilots, observers, and mechanics as well as bases in Canada. It was not to be. From the moment it had been approved, the government went to great lengths to emphasize that the wing was not a permanent air service but rather was designed for use in the current war only.¹⁸ The permanency as an air force that so many wanted for Canada once again proved just beyond reach, more so since the wing was disbanded in early 1920 due to a government decision to focus on civilian aviation. Military aviation, as had been concluded in the earlier attempts to create a Canadian Air Force, was once again deemed to be too expensive.

The same was true for the other air force that had formed during the final year of the war. This air force was the product of incursions by German U-boats into Canadian waters in 1918 that led to a desire to create a Canadian naval air service. More than 600 applicants wanted to join the embryonic Royal Canadian Naval Air Service (RCNAS), but, unfortunately, the Canadian government was unwilling to support the costs of this fledgling branch once the operational emergency of the First World War was over. As a result, the RCNAS's birth on 5 September 1918 was quickly followed by its disbandment a little over two months later.¹⁹

The scrapping of the RCNAS and overseas wing marked the end of the third and fourth attempts to establish some type of national air service since McCurdy's first flights nine years earlier, and as a result, there is little wonder many members of the Air Force that was created in February 1920 did not see much hope for their future. Indeed, the fact that it was the non-permanent and non-professional component of the civilian Air Board led one historian to correctly observe that this new CAF was an "air force in name but not fact."²⁰ At least one other modern critic took this sentiment even further by calling the CAF a "travesty of a force."²¹ While the latter observation is perhaps a bit excessive, the CAF did indeed have its fair share of troubles getting established in what the Officer in Charge of Camp Borden, R. A. Logan, colourfully labelled as their "bow and arrow days ..."²² For instance, the CAF's pay was lower than the civilian operations branch and that, one individual claimed, left many wondering:

why enlist in the CAF when the civil Operations Branch pays more. There are excellent mechanics who would be very willing to serve if they got permanent employment I feel that any money paid me for recruiting for the CAF is

wasted. It would be more economical in the end to have a few men well trained than a large number of men who are hard up, and come up simply for a job and to have a holiday.²³

Worse yet, the quality of recruits and mechanics was also low, since most men who signed on for the training would then use that experience to get full-time jobs elsewhere. As one air force officer observed in June 1921:

The main trouble in getting the right kind of men here is that there is nothing to attract them We are getting as good as we can expect in the way of officers, and until we make it worth while for a man to come here, we never will get better Very often a man leaves his own job to come here, and somebody else gets it. Until we can offer him something better, he is going to think twice before coming. We are getting two classes of men. The class out of a job will take anything. There is another class. The one who is coming to learn, who is not worrying about the pay. He is considering training, and comes up for all the instruction he expects to get. As soon as he considers himself good enough, he will take a civilian position, because there is nothing to attract him to the CAF at present Most of the men are not here out of patriotism. It is for what they can learn. In the meantime we have got to trust our lives to these men.²⁴

The need for permanency was all too clear as few officers in the CAF understood

the logic of why most people would want to serve in an organization that paid so little and “which is practically non-existent.”²⁵

Discipline was also an issue, as another CAF officer found that “the present regulations lead to very lax discipline. It leads to a policy which seems to be ‘eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we are fired.’ The regulations are very bad for discipline and that applies to mechanics as well as officers. They know they are here for a short while and don’t [sic] care.”²⁶ It is hard to ascertain exactly how bad the discipline problems in the CAF were. Testimony from some members during this period suggests that morale was relatively good, since the CAF consisted of ex-service men who enjoyed any chance to fly. Yet many other accounts paint an altogether different picture. Desertion, for instance, was a real problem as the vast majority of courts of inquiry in this period dealt with unauthorized absences. It is also a well-documented fact that the immediate incarnation of the Canadian Air Force (the Canadian overseas Wing of 1918–1920) suffered from at least two mutinies in January 1919.²⁷

The CAF was certainly a different entity than its immediate predecessor, but there is little doubt that it, too, suffered from the same lack of military cohesion. Although it did have its own dark blue serge uniform patterned on an Army cut with buttons and badges of silver, the use of that uniform was sometimes inconsistent. One officer recalled how:

...for many months after the CAF started we were permitted to wear any kind of uniform, army, navy or RAF or any combination thereof, during working hours, but for dinner we were supposed to dress in CAF blues, with wing collar. At Borden, this practice apparently continued “for the first two years” of

the CAF's existence in order to permit us to wear out our old RFC, RNAS, or RAF clothing. At the Officers mess we could wear almost anything ...²⁸

Others complained that the CAF uniform was impracticable and soon lost its “neat appearance” once subjected to the rigours of training. Despite the fact that the Air Officer Commanding the CAF, Air Commodore A. K. Tylee, felt that this outfit “was ‘democratic and economical’ and would enhance the identity of the service,”²⁹ other senior members clearly listened to these complaints recording that CAF personnel wanted “a new uniform now.” More to the point, however, the lack of a practical and enforced uniform policy made it difficult for CAF members to identify themselves as a military force, and that led one serving individual to the conclusion that “whatever might be said of the RAF one, at least they [have] a workable uniform.”³⁰



The use of officer rank titles was equally problematic, as these ex-RFC fliers often ignored CAF regulations by using their Army ranks over Air Force ones. While Army ranks were almost always used verbally, the written record was much more confused. A scan of official correspondence identifies a strange mix where the same officer might use his Air Force rank in one instance and his Army one in another.³¹ The CAF suffered from other inconsistencies as well. There was a tremendous need for new pilots, as most of the ex-RFC personnel were getting older, but solutions to this problem were not forthcoming. Suggestions to extend the flying age reeked of desperation and only served to delay the inevitable.³² The equipment needed to keep these pilots flying was also aging. While the British had apparently reported that Canada had made the most “profitable use” of the aircraft gifted to any of the Dominions, those machines were now obsolete and quickly wearing out after three years of service.³³

The training facilities at Camp Borden were also in trouble. The training itself was often ad-libbed and was simply designed to ensure that aircrew did not forget what they had learned from the war. It further provided an opportunity to update pilots on recent improvements to aircraft or flight techniques, yet even this refresher training was eventually abandoned in the spring of 1922. This not only resulted in the virtual cessation of flight operations at Borden, but also led the officer in charge at the base to “eventually quit in disgust.”³⁴ Moreover, Borden personnel were often forced to do whatever they could to keep aircraft flying, as the following story from the base illustrates:

Of course, we started with no flying equipment, in the GIS [Ground Instructional School], but by wrangling, scrounging and digging through the scraps of dozens of wrecked Curtiss “Jennys” that had been left behind as not worth carting

away, in a hangar near us, we eventually had not one but four Jennys in good flying condition and we used them Lacking authority to do all this it was difficult to maintain our boot-leg air fleet and eventually we lost it³⁵

For the man who had become the inspector-general of the CAF on 23 April 1920, Air Vice Marshal Sir Willoughby Gwatkin, the solution to all these problems was always the same. In order to survive and raise morale, the CAF had to become a permanent and professional force; adopting the symbols of the Royal Air Force was seen as one way of achieving this aim.³⁶

The first RAF symbol that the CAF embraced was the ensign. Having heard in February 1921 that the RAF had designed its own ensign, Gwatkin wanted the CAF to do the same. It was a good idea. As a mark of national identification, an ensign would give the CAF's members a powerful object to rally around. Much like the First World War, the Air Force's first inclination was to Canadianize a British concept by using the RAF ensign with the addition of a maple leaf in the inner circle. The RAF's chief of the air staff, Air Marshal Hugh Trenchard, agreed that the CAF should adopt his service's ensign, but suggested that "to retain the sentiment of unity between the Air Services of the Empire" it was better if no changes to the original were made. The RAF had its own reasons for not wanting the change. Much like the CAF, the RAF was also fighting for its existence, and the chances that it would be usurped by the British Army and Royal Navy would be diminished if more Dominions flew its flag. It was a convenient argument but one that the CAF understood all too well. As a result, Gwatkin was willing to accept the British condition that the ensign be accepted "without difference." What was more important was that the CAF had a symbol that, in Trenchard's words, represented:

... the good work that Canadian Pilots and Observers carried out under me in France, and I am very glad to think that they and their successors use the Royal Air Force ensign, the underlying idea of which is the target used to mark all British machines in France, and in connection with which so many gallant airmen fought their last fight.

Gwatkin agreed. Adopting the RAF ensign was indeed "an honour and privilege," but he also wanted to take full advantage of the situation to draw attention to the CAF. He therefore ordered that the flag raising ceremony scheduled for 30 November 1921 at Camp Borden was to be "made as pompous as possible." Unfortunately, the upcoming election ensured that key dignitaries were unable to attend, yet the CAF had nevertheless made an important stride. It now had a symbol that was associated with the motherland, and this link, it was hoped, would make it that much more difficult for the government to simply abolish the CAF.³⁷



The same logic applied to appeals for the CAF to adopt the Royal prefix. One air officer, at a senior air conference in June 1921, not only suggested that "there may be something in the name of the CAF," but also that the "King be approached to use the name Royal Canadian Air Force and that Prince Royal Albert be appointed an Honorary Colonel." His argument, while not stated implicitly, was obvious. The Royal title and linkages to

Royal Family would give the CAF a sense of permanency since no government (it was assumed) would dare disband an organization associated with the monarchy. Gwatkin was not convinced and he instead used this occasion to shore up fissures within the CAF by observing that:

The King would grant the privilege if only having regard to what Canadians did in the RAF during the war. We do not like the King to be mentioned with a thing that is not going to be a success Unless we are certain, unless we are quite satisfied the CAF is going to go on, we do not like to ask members of the Royal Family to accept posts, when some threatens resignation. It fills one with sinister forebodings.³⁸

Gwatkin had good reason for concern. The uncertainty of the CAF's future made many members jittery, so much so, in fact, that it was noted how "present employees should be sounded out as to whether they would be prepared to join a permanent Air Force."³⁹

The election of William Lyon Mackenzie King in December 1921 and his minority Liberal Government's promises of a rigid economy and drastic retrenchment only heightened these concerns. Once again the CAF faced the same problem that haunted all of its predecessors; namely, its existence was being threatened by proposed budgetary cuts and a lack of political support. In fact, one Liberal member captured the mood of the post-war political climate perfectly when he noted that the effort expended on the CAF was:

... a pretty high price to pay for an air service in peace time. If we had a war, of course it would be necessary to keep our air service and we would expect to have accidents. But it is a crime to render our

very best young men ... liable to be killed or dangerously injured, just for the sake of having in Canada a service which is absolutely unnecessary.⁴⁰

Few politicians understood the need to maintain an air force, and as a result, the prevailing view was that the "high cost of a military force would cause it to be so small in peacetime as to be negligible in war."⁴¹

It was a period of tremendous uncertainty for the CAF. In an effort to find economies and trim the budget, King's Government not only cut expenditures to the military as a whole, but it also embarked on a reorganization that would consolidate the CAF, RCN, and militia under a single Department of National Defence. Gwatkin had worked hard to get the CAF recognized as an independent and equal service, and the fact that it was represented on what would become the Defence Council in 1920 was certainly evidence of his efforts. Yet by the time of the reorganization, both the RCN and militia still saw air power as something that existed merely to serve and support their needs over land and sea.⁴² No one captured this view more vividly than the Chief of the General Staff, Major-General J. H. MacBrien, who wrote that the Canadian defence establishment "will not be large enough to warrant a separate Branch of the Service such as the Royal Air Force, and our Flying Corps should be part of the Army with attachments to the Navy as required."⁴³ MacBrien eventually modified his view on the need for a separate air service, but the CAF's independence and identity was, at times, clearly challenged by the other services which often looked at the air force "as a friendly enemy ..."⁴⁴ In fact, the Air Force was treated very much as a junior partner, more so since it was administered as a Directorate of the General Staff to allow "the Air Force to draw on the experience of the senior officers of the older services."⁴⁵

While many rightfully feared the Liberal's planned cuts to the military, the CAF actually benefited from the creation of a single Department of National Defence in one particular area. For instance, the reorganization, which received royal assent on 28 June 1922 and was effected six months later, finalized the CAF's divorce from the civilian Air Board and, in the process, turned it into Canada's only air service. More importantly, however, it also became a permanent force that would serve as a core through which the entire service could expand in times of emergency. Indeed, air members quickly jumped on this distinction to lay plans for the recruitment and training of younger pilots whose new blood would finally revitalize the aging CAF.⁴⁶

Having overcome his earlier reservations about applying the Royal designation to a force with a questionable future, Gwatkin was now satisfied that the changes to the CAF would make it a viable organization. As a result, when the Director of Technical Services drew attention in the spring of 1922 to the fact that Australia had obtained permission to use the Royal prefix, Gwatkin indicated that he was now willing to do likewise once the reorganization of the CAF was complete.⁴⁷ It was a powerful symbolic gesture which captured Gwatkin's confidence in the permanency of the new Air Force, explaining why one of his last acts before retiring was to ask the Chief of the General Staff:

... as soon as things have settled down [for] the right to use the prefix "Royal." Already the Australian Air Force has received that titular distinction from the King. But it was we who led the way in securing the right to fly the light blue ensign, and the CAF now firmly established, would like to share the privilege enjoyed by the Canadian Navy, as well as by permanent units and corps of the Canadian militia."⁴⁸

MacBrien agreed, noting that the CAF had indeed "earned the privilege of being entitled to 'Royal' and [I] feel sure that they will prize it highly."⁴⁹ Using other links to the RAF as a means to strengthen the CAF's standing and growing professionalism followed.

Believing that it was "considered wisest for the status of the Canadian Air Force to be kept as close as possible to the Royal Air Force," MacBrien also agreed that the Air Force Act should be modified for Canadian requirements and then applied to the CAF in the same way "the Army Act is to the Permanent Force."⁵⁰ This, it was argued, instantly would give the CAF a more reliable set of regulations and allow it to take advantage of the experience that the RAF had gained.⁵¹ Likewise, the adoption of the British drill and ceremonial manual achieved the same effect. But it was the decision to wear the RAF uniform (a duplicate with exception of RCAF appearing on all buttons) and rank structure which represented one of the most visible examples of how the CAF was symbolically using the mother country as a professional marker and tool to further guarantee its permanency.⁵²

Perhaps worried about their own defence cuts, the RAF saw tremendous "importance to the wearing by the Air Forces of Empire of a common uniform" and they accordingly encouraged other Commonwealth nations to follow the Canadian example.⁵³ The adoption of the RAF's motto would achieve the same effect—although it is interesting to note that recently unearthed documents clearly show that Canada did not officially apply to use "*per ardua ad astra*" until the summer of 1928.⁵⁴ It also was observed that Canada had taken the lead in adopting the RAF ensign, and having already done so for Australians in 1921, the British happily provided their blessing for the CAF to adopt the Royal prefix.⁵⁵ These symbolic links to the empire paid off. Questionable political arguments about the Air Force's strategic value

now could be brushed aside, as the RCAF's ability to integrate with the RAF gave it a global *raison d'être* that the purely national air force could never justify. In essence, the deliberate policy of conforming as closely as possible to RAF equipment, procedure, and regulations ensured that the expansion of the small RCAF would be "a very simple matter" in times of an imperial emergency.⁵⁶ Suggestions from Britain to Canada on how both could render mutual assistance, build up the air forces of their respective countries, and "co-operate in the event of war" only served to strengthen the RCAF's importance to the potential defence of the Commonwealth.⁵⁷ And that further gave the RCAF the sense of permanency it so desired.

The adoption of the Royal prefix was indeed symbolically important, and its effects were felt almost immediately. Although the King granted permission for the CAF to use his royal title on 12 February 1923, a weekly order promulgated one month later observed that the Royal would apply to the new "permanent force and not the temporary CAF." The birthdate of this organization was set for 1 April 1924, but it was hard for many to contain their enthusiasm. Comments from officials that conferring the Royal title upon the CAF would "add greatly to the prevailing *esprit-de-corps*," were validated by serving members. Perhaps the most revealing came from a former CAF officer who later recalled how "there was a sort of revival of the 'military spirit' in the belief that the CAF would become the RCAF and would then become a sort of step-child of the RAF."⁵⁸ Nor was this impression contained to the military, as one potential recruit observed that his decision to apply to the new RCAF was based on a desire "to get placed in something with a future."⁵⁹ The long journey for recognition as a permanent and professional force had finally come to an end.

The RCAF matured quickly during the interwar and early war years, and it did not take long before many of the symbols it had



adopted from the British were Canadianized. For instance, in July 1940, the RCAF adopted its own ensign in which the maple leaf finally appeared at the centre of the roundel, because, as it was explained at the time, "of the desirability of distinguishing the Royal Canadian Air Force from the Royal Air Force."⁶⁰ Approval to replace the centre of aircraft roundels with a maple leaf was also granted earlier in the war, but it was not until after six hard years of fighting that the RCAF took yet another leap to define itself as a Canadian institution by finally adopting the new roundel on 19 January 1946.⁶¹ The RCAF tartan and the adoption of Pilot Officer John Gillespie Magee's "High Flight" as the Air Force's poem—along with the policy of "Canadianization," which represented a deliberate and nationalistic attempt for as many Canadian airmen and ground crew as possible to serve under Canadian officers, command, and regulations—further helped identify the RCAF as a distinct organization from the RAF. The creation of the King's Colour and the Colour of the RCAF in January 1949 (both of which were consecrated in Ottawa on 5 June 1950) did the same thing. Unlike earlier colours, which were presented to components of the RAF only, the RCAF was the first of any of the Royal Air Forces to have the King's Colour dedicated to an individual or national air force.⁶² It was a fitting

tribute to a service that had performed so well in the defence of the Empire and the democratic world.

The RCAF continued to play an important role in the post-war period, but it was an event in the late 1960s, namely the unification of the three services into a single Canadian Armed Forces, that once again saw the Air Force's identity challenged. Much like the early 1920s when the Canadian Air Force faced the threat of being usurped into the RCN and militia, the remnants of the air force in the late 1960s did not have a central authority or a command structure, and its assets were dispersed throughout the Canadian Force's functional commands. Moreover, the fears from the early 1920s about not being recognized as an independent or permanent force were again haunting air members of the new CF, particularly since the RCAF had ceased to exist on 1 February 1968. Other changes brought on by unification only added to this crisis of identity. The blue that the RCAF had worn since 1924 was now replaced by a generic green uniform and a common rank structure in which wing commanders became lieutenant-colonels. Witnessing the removal of symbols and traditions that had defined their experience with the Air Force, a number of members chose to leave what would be known as the air element of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Unification had gone too far, and as a result, the Air Force slowly began to reclaim its identity. The first crucial step was initiated by a man who should be regarded as the father of the modern Canadian Air Force, Lieutenant-General William Carr. Beginning with the formation of Air Command (AIRCOM) in Winnipeg on 2 September 1975, Carr, who was the first Commander of AIRCOM, effectively restored a central authority and command structure to control all of the CF's air assets and activities. Given that the Air Force had almost ceased to exist, Carr took great care to give his command



Lieutenant-General William Carr

new life through the adoption of various Air Force symbols. The AIRCOM badge sent a particularly powerful message, as the eagle rising from the Canadian astral crown was designed to denote the air element taking flight and becoming an entity in the form of a command. The ensign achieved a similar effect, standing as a marker of the command's existence, while the original CAF motto of the early 1920s, *sic itur ad astra*, was selected "because it was Canadian, not RAF because its choice could not be interpreted as an echo of the RCAF." The command was also given a new set of colours to rally around which were consecrated in July 1982.⁶³ It was a pivotal moment that was followed by other acts—such as the restoration of Air Force uniforms in 1985 and the resurrection of the Chief of the Air Staff 12 years later—that once again created a greater sense of permanency and autonomy from the CF's other two elements.

Carr's efforts clearly paid off, as a recognizable Air Force once again rose out of the ashes of the initial confusion created by unification. And thanks to the establishment of AIRCOM, today's RCAF is a confident, experienced, resilient, agile, integrated, and coherent air force, yet that fact might leave some current members wondering why the new Royal title is required, while others might even feel it is actually a retrograde step.

Part of the answer to these key questions lie with E. C. Russell, who observed in his book on CF heritage that:

customs and traditions are not sacrosanct for all time. Like words of the language, they are living things; they come and go. For they reflect social conditions and moral values. They mirror political innovation and technological advance. They change. As Alfred Whitehead, the philosopher, put it, societies which cannot combine reverence for their symbolism with freedom of revision must ultimately decay. It is essential that outworn sentiment be quietly retired, and it will be, for the essence of custom and tradition is that they live by consent.⁶⁴

It is for this reason that the restoration of the RCAF is particularly important for the Air Force's current members. For instance, the return of the Royal prefix not only reminds RCAF 2.0 of the hard-earned road its predecessor's took to get recognition as a permanent institution but also provides a link between the heroic actions of the previous RCAF and the professionalism of those who have served since that time. More importantly, however, the name change symbolically recognizes that the air element of the CF is indeed an "Air Force." This is a key distinction. The RCAF has had to guard its independence and permanency as a separate service at various times throughout its history. Usually the culprit was government cutbacks, reorganizations, or command and control issues with the Army and Navy, but since these types of situations can easily occur again in the future, the RCAF is wise to embrace the symbols that help define it as an institution.

While the name change has not resulted in any organizational adjustment (there being no diminution of unification through the restoration of the element's former titles), it has nevertheless finished an important exercise in self-identification that Carr started in 1975. It has been a worthwhile endeavour. The Air Force of today has a strong identity based on a proud history. Since the first Canadians took flight over a century ago, the members of Canada's Air Force helped to win two world wars, maintained a fragile cold war peace, brought aid and comfort to suffering people worldwide, was involved in combat over the skies of Iraq, Kosovo as well as Libya, and fought a global campaign against terrorism. The RCAF 2.0 team can take great pride in this heritage and the new name only serves to strengthen its sense of identity as an air force. ☺

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Abbreviations

AIRCOM	Air Command
CAC	Canadian Aviation Corps
CAF	Canadian Air Force
CF	Canadian Forces
RAF	Royal Air Force
RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
RCN	Royal Canadian Navy
RCNAS	Royal Canadian Naval Air Service
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
RNAS	Royal Naval Air Service

Notes

1. The author of the term "RCAF 2.0" is currently unknown.
2. W. S. Breadner lecture, "The Royal Canadian Air Force," n.d., Directorate of History and Heritage (hereafter cited as DHH), 181.009 (D2); R. A. Logan to F. H. Hitchins, 6 August 1955, DHH, Logan Papers, 75/117, file 26.
3. W. A. B. Douglas, *The Creation of a National Air Force: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force, Volume 2*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986).
4. *Ibid.*, 48.
5. Fred Hitchins, *Air Board, CAF and RCAF, 1919–1939*, vol 1, Directorate of Air Force Heritage and History, Griffin Collection, 12.
6. Desmond Morton, "A Non-Operational Air Force: The RCAF, 1924–1931," in *Sic Itur Ad Astra: Canadian Aerospace Power Studies, Volume 3 Combat if Necessary, but not Necessarily Combat*, ed. Bill March (Government of Canada, 2011), 3.
7. E. C. Russell, *Customs and Traditions of the Canadian Forces* (Ottawa: Deneau Publishers, 1981), 1.
8. National Defence, "Directorate of History and Heritage", www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/her-pat/index-eng.asp (accessed August 8, 2012).
9. Department of National Defence, A-DH-267-004/AF-001, *Insignia and Lineages of the Canadian Forces*, vol. 4: *Operational Air Squadrons*, Date of Publication: April 5, 2000; Russell, *Customs and Traditions*, 1.
10. National Defence, "Directorate of History and Heritage."
11. *Royal Canadian Air Force Historical Review*, 1909–1951, DHH, 74/507; Brereton Greenhous and Hugh Halliday, *Canada's Air Forces 1914–1999* (Montréal: Art Global, 1999), 13; *Canadian Air Policy 1909–1939*, DHH, Hitchins Papers, 74/27; and Hugh Halliday, *Chronology of Canadian Military Aviation*, Canadian War Museum Paper No. 6. National Museum of Man and Mercury Series.
12. Greenhous and Halliday, 15; *Royal Canadian Air Force Historical Review, 1909–1951*, DHH, 74/507.
13. S. F. Wise, *Canadian Airmen and the First World War, The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force Volume 1* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 590.
14. Collishaw to Curtis, April 29, 1970, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter cited as LAC), MG 31 G9, file 8, Curtis Papers. With typical Canadian modesty, Raymond Collishaw, himself a top air ace with 60 victories, later challenged this view. "The belief [that the Canadians did better in the air than British pilots] was fostered by the Canadian press, which tended to glorify Canadian events," he wrote to Air Marshal Curtis in 1965, continuing with, "however, the whole idea is fake." Collishaw was correct, but his calculations did identify that the young Dominion's aviators were about equal to their British counterparts.
15. As quoted in Greenhous and Halliday, 19.
16. *Canadian Air Policy 1909–1939*, DHH, Hitchins Papers, 74/27.
17. *Active Service Canadian Force serving in the Royal Air Force*, Canadian, November 1918, LAC, RG 9, II-1-9, vol. 179.
18. Greenhous and Halliday, 23–24.
19. "Wings over water: Canada's Naval Aviators, 1915–1975," *Legion Magazine*, November – December 2010, 28–32; Morton, 1.
20. Hitchins, *Air Board*, 106.
21. No author, "The Second Oldest Air Force," *Pathfinder*, no. 114, June 2009, 2.
22. Logan to Hitchins, 18 October 1959, DHH, Logan Papers, 75/117, file 26.

23. Proceedings of Canadian Air Force Association (CAFA) Conference, 22 June 1921, DHH, 181.003 (D2716).
24. Logan, Proceedings of CAFA Conference, 22 June 1921, DHH, 181.003 (D2716).
25. *Ibid.*
26. Proceedings of CAFA Conference, Camp Borden, 22 June 1921, DHH, 181.003 (D 2716).
27. Rachel Lea Heide, "After the Emergency: Demobilization Strikes, Political Statements, and the Moral Economy in Canada's Air Forces, 1919–1946," in *The Insubordinate and the Non-compliant: Case Studies of Canadian Mutiny and Disobedience, 1920 to Present*, ed. Howard Coombs (Toronto: Dundurn, 2008), 179–83, 202. In both instances the causes of the insurrection, which consisted of airmen refusing to parade or carry out orders, were attributed to a desire for better treatment, conditions of service, pay, and clarification on demobilization policies. "Poor leadership and transgressing the men's sense of self-respect" were also attributed as mitigating factors to the disturbances, while "slovenly deportment" within the Air Force was seen as contributing to the general state of low morale.
28. Logan to Hitchins, 6 August 1955, and Logan to Manning, 29 June 1960, DHH, Logan Papers, 75/117, file 26.
29. Douglas, 51.
30. Logan, Proceedings of CAFA Conference, 22 June 1921, DHH, 181.003 (D2716).
31. Logan to Hitchins, 12 July 1955, and Hitchins to Logan, 21 July 1955, DHH, Logan Papers, 75/117, file 26; Logan to Manning, 29 June 1960, DHH, Logan Papers, 75/117, file 26.
32. Hitchins, *Air Board*, 26–28, 82.
33. Air Board Minutes, 7 February 1922, LAC, RG 24, vol. 3517, file 866-17-1; Extract from memo CGS, Statutory Authority, 8 August 1923, DHH 76/37; and Hitchins, *Air Board*, 106.
34. Douglas, 51–52; and Logan to Manning, 30 March 1960, DHH, Logan Papers, 75/117, file 26.
35. Logan to Manning, 30 March 1960, DHH, Logan Papers, 75/117, file 26.
36. Proceedings of CAFA Conference, 22 June 1921, DHH, 181.003 (D2716).
37. See various correspondence on files LAC, RG 25, G-1, vol. 1300, file 1061; and LAC, RG 24 vol. 5221, file 19-7-26. The quotes in the paragraphs following the previous endnote are attributed to these sources.
38. Proceedings of CAFA Conference, 22 June 1921, DHH, 181.003 (D2716). Each of the quotes following the previous endnote comes from this source.
39. Various minutes, 1922, LAC, RG 24, vol. 3517, file 866-17-1.
40. Hansard, 1921 Session, Vol. IV, (23 May 1921), 3899–3906.
41. Hitchins, *Air Board*, 11.
42. Logan to Hitchins, 6 August 1955, DHH, Logan Papers, 75/117, file 26; Morton, 11.
43. As quoted in Douglas, 58.
44. MacBrien Statement, Proceedings of CAFA Conference, 22 June 1921, DHH, 181.003 (D2716).
45. CGS memo, Statutory Authority, 14 September 1923, DHH 76/37.
46. Hitchins, *Air Board*, 106.
47. 10 May 1922, Air Board Minutes, LAC, RG 24, vol. 17664, file 045-3.
48. Gwatkin to MacBrien, 10 May 1922, LAC, RG 24, vol. 17664, file 045-3.
49. MacBrien to Gwatkin, 11 May 1922, LAC, RG 24, vol. 17664, file 045-3.
50. MacBrien to JAG, 12 December 1922, LAC, RG 24, vol. 6523, HQ 462-23-1.
51. Inclusion of Air Force Regulations, 10 January 1923, LAC, RG 24, vol. 6523, HQ

462-23-1; CGS to AG, 23 January 1923, LAC, RG 24, vol. 6523, HQ 462-23-1; and DCGS to DS and T, 27 February 1923, LAC, RG 24, vol. 6523, HQ 462-23-1.

52. Hitchins, *Air Board*, 124. Memo to Commonwealths, 11 April 1923, Public Records Office (Hereafter cited as PRO), CO 532, 240/3988; Pocaud to Secretary of the Air Ministry, 6 February 1923, PRO, CO 532, 240/3988.

53. Letter to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 26 March 1923, PRO, CO 532, 240/3988.

54. Minute notes, 18 August 1928, PRO, AIR 2, 337/857405/28; Slater to Secretary, 28 August 1928, PRO, AIR 2, 337/857405/28; O. D. Skelton (for Secretary of State for External Affairs), 18 June 1928, PRO, AIR 2, 337/857405/28; Amery to Secretary of State Canada, 27 September 1928, PRO, AIR 2, 337/857405/28; O. D. Skelton to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 12 October 1928, PRO, AIR 2, 337/857405/28.

55. Minute note, 2 February 1923, PRO, AIR 2 236/407693/23; Letter to E. Marsh, 12 February 1923, PRO, CO 532, 240/3988.

56. Pocaud to Secretary of the Air Ministry, 6 February 1923, PRO, CO 532, 240/3988. CGS speaking of the Air Force, Statutory Authority, n.d., DHH 76/37.

57. Secretary of State to Governor General, 16 January 1924, PRO, CO 886/10 and PRO, CO 532, 240/3988; Committee of Imperial Defence, Air Requirements of the Dominions, Canada, circa 16 October 1923, PRO, AIR, 19/116. For an excellent account of this incident involving the RCAF's humanitarian involvement in Poland see: Hugh Halliday, "Penicillin for Poland: A Tale of Two Plaques," *Legion Magazine* (November – December) 2011, 50–53.

58. Byng of Vimy [Governor General Lord Byng] to Duke of Devonshire, 15 January 1923, PRO, AIR 2 236/407693/23; and Logan to Manning, 29 June 1960, DHH, Logan Papers, 75/117, file 26.

59. Arthur Bell letter, 8 August 1923, DHH, 75/373, Granger Papers, folder A-15.

60. K. S. MacLachlan to DM, 27 January 1940, LAC, GV Walsh Papers, MG 30 E 308, E-311.

61. Walsh to CAS, 14 December 1945, LAC, GV Walsh Papers, MG 30 E 308, E-311. The trigger for implementing that change is worth telling, as it illustrates the frustration the RCAF often felt when others overlooked their achievements due to an inability to distinguish them from the British. As Air Vice Marshal Walsh explained to the Chief of the Air Staff on 14 December 1945: "I was speaking to Air Commodore Plant yesterday and in the course of conversation he mentioned that during his recent flight to Warsaw he felt it was definitely not appreciated by the Poles that Canadian aircraft flew the Penicillin to Poland. ... For some time past I have been thinking it would be of great advantage if we replace the red circle on our aircraft markings by the red Maple Leaf ... there would certainly be no doubt whatever as to the nationality of the aircraft." For an excellent account of this incident involving the RCAF's humanitarian involvement in Poland, see: Hugh Halliday, "Penicillin for Poland" 50–53.

62. Russell, *Customs and Traditions*, 168; and RCAF Publication, Canadian Air Publication 90, Chapter 20.

63. Catherine Eyre, "The organization of Air Command, 1973-1976," DHH, Catherine Allan Collection, 77/529. File 2, 134; and AIR COMMAND Ceremonial Program presentation of Colours, 31 July 1982, DHH, 83/13.

64. Russell, *Customs and Traditions*, 1.