

The Canadian Air Force at High River



When the Canadian Air Force was formed in 1923, the High River Air Station was the busiest in the country. Throughout the 1920's, High River was at the forefront of aviation in Canada.

The air force returned to High River in earnest during World War II as the Calgary Aero Club and the RCAF combined to operate a very successful Elementary Flying Training School that graduated thousands of young pilots for service overseas.



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Dave Birrell

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Back cover: Cornells over High River (courtesy Gordon Jones); Canadian Air Force cap badge, 5 Elementary Flying Training School crest; Royal Canadian Air Force crest

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| Introduction | 7 |
| Prelude to the High River Air Station | 9 |
| High River Air Station 1921 | 11 |
| High River Air Station 1922 | 17 |
| High River Air Station 1923 | 21 |
| High River Air Station 1924 | 25 |
| High River Air Station 1925 | 29 |
| High River Air Station 1926 | 37 |
| High River Air Station 1927 | 39 |
| High River Air Station 1928 | 45 |
| High River Air Station 1929 | 47 |
| High River Air Station 1930 | 49 |
| High River Air Station 1931 to 1940 | 51 |
| The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan | 53 |
| 5 Elementary Flying Training School (Lethbridge) | 57 |
| 5 Elementary Flying Training School 1941 | 61 |
| 5 Elementary Flying Training School 1942 | 79 |
| 5 Elementary Flying Training School 1943 | 95 |
| 5 Elementary Flying Training School 1944 | 105 |
| Gordon Jones and Tiger Moth 1214 | 121 |



De Havilland DH.4 at High River

INTRODUCTION

During January of 1921, land prices in the Calgary area were too high for the fledgling Air Board of Canada, so an empty field northeast of the town of High River was selected as the site of one of Canada's first 'Air Stations'. Throughout the 1920's, aircraft based at High River made hundreds of flights over the forests of the foothills and mountains of southern Alberta as part of a fire-protection program, pioneering work in radio was done, aerial photography surveys were completed, record breaking parachute jumps were made, and legendary civilian and military pilots such as Jock Palmer, Punch Dickens, and Freddie McCall came and went.

Following a decade of relative inactivity on the site and with Canada at war, the Royal Canadian Air Force returned and, within a very few months, an Elementary Flying Training School was operating on the airfield. A close relationship was developed between the Town of High River and the Flying School. As well as training pilots, the air force, in conjunction with the citizens of High River, entertained royalty, fought floods and wildfires, and hosted community sports days and dances.

More than a quarter of a million hours of flying were recorded at 5 EFTS as 106 classes of novice pilots were graduated and went on to Service Flying Training Schools for further training and to receive the coveted RCAF pilot's wings. With the sheer volume of training, augmented by the pressures of wartime, there were tragedies at 5 EFTS as well, with fifteen young airmen losing their lives.

-NOTE TO READER-

This story of the High River Station from 1920 through 1931 is told largely by aviation historian and researcher, Bruce Gowans. Assisted by funding provided by the Alberta Historical Resource Foundation, Bruce published a paper for the Foundation in 1995 based on his extensive research. Much of the following is taken, with permission, directly from Bruce's work.

PRELUDE TO THE HIGH RIVER AIR STATION

In 1919, following the end of the First World War, Britain signed the Peace Convention in Paris which committed Canada to the International Convention for Air Navigation and required it to control air navigation within its borders. This involved the issuing of regulations and overseeing air traffic. To facilitate this, the government created the Air Board to control flying in Canada.

Soon after the establishment of the Air Board, Britain offered Canada a gift of 114 war surplus aircraft and related equipment which the government accepted. It was left to the Air Board to decide what to do with them. Their plan was to utilize the aircraft for civilian operations and eventually turn them over to commercial operators.

However, some members of the Air Board suggested that there should be provisions for military flying and in the spring of 1920, a training establishment was created at Camp Borden, Ontario where pilots had trained during World War I. It became known as the Canadian Air Force and its prime purpose was to provide refresher training for former wartime pilots.

As well as the Camp Borden facility, the Air Board established five other stations for civil flying operations. During the summer of 1919, wildfires had raged over much of what was then the Federal Forest Reserve that covered the eastern slopes of the Canadian Rockies and their foothills. For this reason, it was decided that one of the stations should be near the front ranges of the Canadian Rockies on the Morley Flats in the Bow River Valley, adjacent to the Canadian Pacific Railway main-line. It would be used for forestry patrols to assist with the suppression of wildfires.

The site at Morley was not chosen until June of 1920, so it was not until July that The Air Board was able to send men and materials west to establish the Air Station. By August, two Bessonneau hangars had been erected and the assembly of the aircraft that had been sent out from Camp Borden by rail began.

The Bessonneau hangars were part of the gift given to Canada by the British government. They were a lightweight and portable structure that utilized wooden stanchions supporting

overhead trusses. This framework was then enclosed with custom-fitted tarpaulins and the whole structure was anchored to the ground with ropes and pickets.

The basic Bessonneau Hangar was 20 metres wide by 24 metres deep, but they could be lengthened with additional stanchions and trusses. With a clear height of just over four metres, the Bessonneaus easily housed most types of military aircraft then in service.

The first flights did not take place until September. After this regular forestry patrols were undertaken and, by the time flying ceased for the season, a total of seventy-four hours had been flown.

The aircraft used were an Avro 504K and a de Havilland DH.9A. Although the worst of the fire season was over by the time the patrols had started, the Forestry officials were enthusiastic about them. Their report left little doubt that the Dominion Forestry Branch would have the patrols continue.

Two lessons had been learned during the brief season. The first was that the station was located too close to the mountains where the strong winds made operations difficult. The second lesson was that the Avro 504 was not powerful enough to make progress against the strong winds that were often encountered.



The Morley Air Station in 1921

HIGH RIVER AIR STATION -1921

When the Morley Air Station was closed for the season in the fall of 1920, the personnel were given the task of selecting a new site for 1921. Their first choice was Calgary, but land at what the Air Board felt was a reasonable price could not be found. However, a suitable site was located just north of the town of High River on property belonging to Mrs. M.A.E. Robertson. By January, a two year lease on the land had been secured and a temporary office was established in the town.

There was much excitement in High River when it was announced that a permanent air station was to be established, but there were also some concerns. An article in a January 1921 issue of the High River Times reads,

"Have you figured out what you would do if you were driving along a road with a nervous horse and an aeroplane from the High River Aerodrome suddenly swooped down and frightened the horse into a runaway that smashed your wagon and injured the animal and yourself?"

An advance party and five railway carloads of equipment arrived in High River on January 20th and tenders were put out for the construction of four buildings -a garage and office, a



Looking northwest to the High River Air Station under construction in 1921



De Havilland DH.4 adjacent to a Bessonneau Hangar at High River workshop, two storage buildings and a 190 foot radio tower. A building to contain the wireless (radio) station was also built. Four 'portable' Bessonneau hangars were erected by station personnel. They had been used in France by the Royal Flying Corps during World War I.

The aircraft were 'kits' that arrived in crates and a great deal of work was required to assemble them. No provision for 'messing' and accommodation on the station were planned for as the personnel were to reside in town. The news of the establishment of the Air Station was welcomed by the town of High River.

The station received approval to board-up one of the hangars. This consisted of replacing the canvas sides and roof with wood sheeting but retaining the canvas door. After sheeting, the roof was covered with a rolled roofing material. The station remained open through the winter during which the aircraft and engines were overhauled. An engine test stand was erected near the workshop. Electrical power was supplied by a gasoline power plant.

Initially, the station received eight de Havilland DH.4 aircraft. Designed by Geoffrey de Havilland, the DH.4 was developed as a light, two-seat combat aircraft, intended to perform both aerial reconnaissance and day bomber missions. The DH.4 performed first flew in August 1916 and less than a

year later, it entered operational service in France.

The first DH.4 flight from the High River Air Station took place on May 6th 1921 and flying continued until October 10th. Two patrols were carried out each day when conditions warranted. One went north as far as the Saskatchewan River, while the other went south to the United States border. A total of 215 forestry patrols were flown with 537 flying hours logged, making the station the most active in Canada.

On August 25th, a fire started on the west side of the Rockies in British Columbia. Three days later, the fire was detected from the air by A.A. Leitch. Two days after that, the fire crossed into the Crowsnest Forest Reserve and for the next two weeks daily patrols were able to provide first hand reports on the progress of the fire and the fire fighting crews.

All the forest patrol aircraft were fitted with 'wireless telephones', capable of transmitting communication from any point in the reserve area to the base and a 'wireless operator' accompanied each forestry patrol. The equipment was able to transmit from the aircraft to the base, but it was not possible to send messages from the base to the aircraft. In the event of a fire being observed, its exact location was determined and a wireless message was then sent off to the air station at High River. The messages were sent by a morse code key and not by voice.

Initially, during 1920 and 1921, the wireless station was operated in cooperation with the Radiotelegraph Branch of the Naval Service. Beginning in 1922, it was operated in conjunction with the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals and the carrying of a 'wireless operator' on the flights was curtailed. The work at the High River Air Station eventually led to the production of 'wireless' sets permitting reliable transmissions over distances of greater than three hundred kilometres..

During September, Major Croil flew to Jasper where he took Colonel Maynard Rogers, the Park Superintendent, on a series of flights over portions of the park where trails were to be constructed. Of the flights Rogers wrote, "It appears almost incredible that one could have covered such enormous distances in so short a time and with such absolute comfort and enjoyment."



Royal Canadian Corps of Signals personnel and an RCAF DH.4

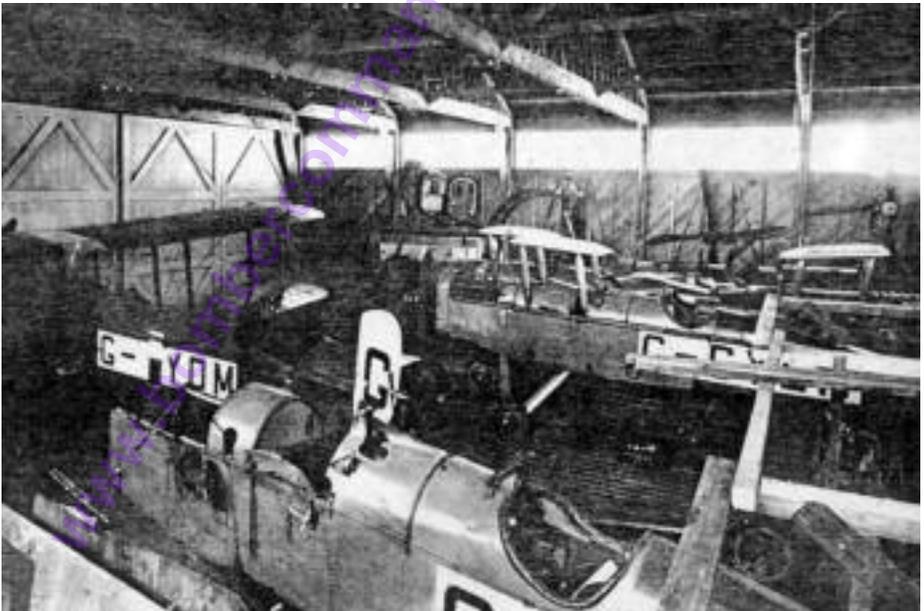
Station aircraft were also used to photograph the Waterton Lakes district for the International Joint Commission that was investigating the water supply in southern Alberta and northern Montana. The Alberta ranchlands had experienced several years of drought, and pressure from ranchers and communities mounted to build a forty to sixty foot high dam at the Bosphorus Narrows, just below the townsite in Waterton Lakes National Park. Had it been built constructed, it would have raised Upper Waterton Lake enough to irrigate 75,000 acres.

The year was not without its difficulties. On May 31st, Captain Carter crashed a DH.4 near the aerodrome shortly after take off when the aircraft stalled at a low altitude during a turn. Both Carter and his wireless operator, W.E. Beatie, received serious injuries. The aircraft was damaged beyond repair.

A more serious accident occurred on August 1st when Captain William Shields crashed a DH.4 during take off from the station. Shields died shortly after he was removed from the wreckage. His wireless operator, C. Harding, escaped with minor injuries. The aircraft was destroyed. This was the first fatality recorded by the Air Board and High River lost a popular resident.



The wreckage of Capt. Shields' DH.4



Partially disassembled, the DH.4's were squeezed into the hangars during the winter of 1921-1922



'Crow Patrol' personnel and a de Havilland DH.4

HIGH RIVER AIR STATION -1922

During 1922, a second Bessonneau hangar was boarded up and a photographic office and Air Foreman Mechanic's office was established inside one of the boarded-in hangars. Station strength consisted of a total of twenty-eight pilots, mechanics, and civilian employees.

One of the many improvements to the station in 1922 was the construction of a new pigeon loft. Live pigeons were carried in the aircraft on patrol and, in the event of a forced landing, a pigeon could be released to fly back to base with a message attached. The first pigeons arrived at the High River Air Station on March 30th.

Forestry patrols continued in a similar manner as in 1921. During the winter, two portable hangars had been constructed for use at the sub-stations that had been established at Pincher Creek and Eckville.

During the 1922 season, the northern patrol landed at Eckville after the morning flight and remained there until late afternoon when it returned to base. The southern patrol landed at Pincher Creek, where it remained until late afternoon when it too returned to base.

A total of 376 forestry patrols were completed with 906 hours being logged. Again, the station was the most active in the country.

The High River Times reported a "remarkable escape" that occurred during the summer of 1922 when Captain



Looking southwest to the four canvas-covered Bessonneau Hangars in 1922.

Note the small Pigeon Loft building to the left of the hangars and the radio building with its 190 foot antenna at right.

Tudhope, “was struck by lightning while flying four thousand feet above Rocky Mountain House. He was unconscious for two minutes, recovering when the plane was three hundred feet from the ground. In instant action he lifted the plane and averted a crash.”

The acceptance of the value of the Forestry Patrols is summed up by quoting from C.H. Morse, District Forest Inspector from Alberta, in the 1923 Report of the Director of Forestry:



Forestry Patrol Map

"It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the daily aeroplane patrol maintained in this district. This lies in the fact that the area covered each day includes all the less accessible portions of the reserves, thus enabling the ranger staff to concentrate on the most dangerous points and attend to other work necessary to the proper administration of the reserve.

The effect of the patrol on campers and fishermen, of whom there are a large number on the area covered, is excellent. Leaflets containing a warning to the public concerning the danger of forest fires have been dropped over fairs and sports held in different parts of the province."

During 1922, aerial photography was undertaken for the National parks Branch, then Reclamation Service, and the Water Power Branch. An interesting flight was carried out for the Geodetic Survey Department in July when J.H. Tudhope was sent to Jasper in a DH.4 to assist Arthur Wheeler, who was in charge of surveying the ‘Great Divide’, which in southern Alberta forms the Alberta-British Columbia border. Wheeler wrote,

"As a means of mountain reconnaissance the aeroplane offers exceptional facilities. Given a clear day and the ability to keep to known landmarks, it is to a topographer a study of a living map, the most accurate that can possibly be had. I was



High River based DH.4 over the Canadian Rockies



Upper Kananaskis Lake as photographed from a High River Air Station aircraft prior to the construction of dams and other development

enabled to get a clear conception of the country my future surveys would cover and the nature of the access to them, and in one case, was able to obtain information that will prevent a considerable loss of time."

In fact, perhaps the most enduring legacy of the High River Air Station are the thousands of aerial photographs taken from its aircraft. These images retain an imprint of settlement and landscape patterns allowing for a unique perspective of conditions in western Canada during the 1920's.



De Havilland DH.4 at High River in 1922



High River Air Station personnel and a DH.4 in front of a canvas-covered Bessonneau hangar

HIGH RIVER AIR STATION -1923

In 1922, the Department of National Defence was formed and it was decided that its responsibilities should include the Air Board which



Canadian Air Force pilot's wings

was incorporated into the Canadian Air Force on January 1 1923. Thus, the Canadian Air Force became responsible for all flying operations in Canada including civilian operations.

During 1921 and 1922, the High River Air Station was the busiest in Canada. As it had been operated by the Air Board of Canada, all personnel were civil servants. With the Station now operated by the newly formed Canadian Air Force, all personnel were required to join the military and the station became a military establishment. The activities at the station, however, remained unchanged.

In 1923 the first winter flying by the Canadian Air Force took place at High River. The purpose was to study winter flying conditions and the use of skis in up to ten inches of snow. During February and March, the DH.4's were flown in a variety of conditions by Squadron Leader Croil and others. Starting procedures for the aircraft engines were tested using different oils, antifreezes, and radiators in a range of temperatures.

Although a very wet spring reduced the need for aerial patrols until August, a total of four hundred hours were flown for the Forestry Department and the focus of the flying program at High River continued to be as a base for forest fire patrols.

However, the pilots were occupied in a variety of other tasks as well. During 1923, this included fifty hours assigned to the Topographical Survey Branch for photographic work to assist in mapping the area between Calgary and Edmonton, twenty-five hours assisting the Parks Branch with patrols in Waterton and the Rocky Mountain Parks, twenty-five hours assigned to the Reclamation Service for photographic work on various rivers, twenty hours helping the Agriculture Department in its attempt to combat caterpillar pests in the Moose Mountain area, and twenty hours transporting members of the Geodetic Survey who were working in Jasper National Park.

On July 1st, disaster, in the form of a violent hail storm, struck the station. In addition to breaking many windows and dislodging the fuel tank, one of the canvas hangars collapsed and was destroyed. During August it was decided not to replace the hangar.

Over the next seven years some minor improvements were made to the station, included the boarding in of the last canvas Bessonneau hangar. As well, a power line was built to the site which eliminated the need for the station's own power plant and a caretaker's cottage was erected at the entrance to the station.

The war surplus aircraft required constant maintenance and were modified in various ways so a separate dope shop to facilitate repairs to their fabric covering was built. Some of the DH.4's were converted to a DH.4B configuration, where the fuel tanks were placed up under the wing instead of between the pilot and navigator. By 1923, all of the DH.4's assigned to fire patrol duty were converted to become a single seat aircraft.



Canadian Air Force Station High River in October 1923. Two of the Bessonneau hangars have been covered by wood and one remains canvas-covered. The gap in the hangar line is the former location of the hangar that was blown down during the hailstorm.



De Havilland DH-4 in hangar for repairs

One problem that the DH.4's had was related to the shrinkage of the wood used in the aircraft structure. The aircraft had been designed in England which has a very damp climate whereas southern Alberta is extremely dry. On November 8th, Squadron Leader Cuffe, while flying a fire patrol, had the pilot's seat collapse and move down onto the controls causing them to jam. With great difficulty, he was able to make a successful landing. In order to do so he had to wedge himself against the side of the aircraft.

The problem was caused when the struts supporting the seat bowed due to bulging of the old plywood sides. In his report on the incident, S/L Cuffe wrote, "Machine G-CYCW has only done sixty hours of flying since last overhaul when she was thoroughly inspected and gone over. It is therefore recommended that serious consideration be given to replacing these old machines with new and modern ones."

Flying time at the High River Air Station during 1923 totalled 555 hours.



Wood-covered Bessonneau hangar



High River during the 1920's as photographed by an Air Station aircraft

HIGH RIVER AIR STATION -1924



**Royal Canadian Air Force Station High River in 1924
The three remaining hangars have been repositioned
and are now all wood-covered.**

On April 1st 1924, the Canadian Air Force became the Royal Canadian Air Force. Its first 'Weekly Orders' referred to six RCAF Stations: RCAF Winnipeg, Manitoba, RCAF Vancouver, BC, RCAF Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, RCAF High River, Alberta, RCAF Ottawa, Ontario, and RCAF Camp Borden, Ontario.

In 1924 the fire hazard was once again low which resulted in only 382 hours being flown on forestry patrol. However, it was a year of expansion for aerial photography in Canada. The High River Air Station logged a total of 256 flying hours on photographic operations during the year. The station lost one of its DH.4's on August 4th when Flying Officer C.A. Mercer crashed in the Porcupine Hills while on the southern patrol. The crash occurred when F/O Mercer got caught in a violent rain storm and struck the top of a hill which was enveloped in rain and cloud. He sustained a broken nose and other injuries but was able to walk to a nearby ranger cabin, from which he was taken to a hospital. The aircraft was completely destroyed.

One noteworthy photographic flight was requested by the National Parks Branch. The flight was made west from High River, up the Highwood River, over the Kananaskis Lakes to Mount Assiniboine, and then returned down the Bow River Valley past Lake Louise and Banff. The flight resulted in a remarkable collection of over one hundred photographs and provides a unique historical record.

Over 23,000 square kilometres were photographed from the High River station in 1924 and used by the Topographical Survey Branch to produce revised maps of the Vermilion, Edmonton, Wainwright and Brazeau districts. A large part of this area had never been adequately surveyed due to the nature of the terrain, and the aerial photographs were said to have, “provided results more complete and accurate than can be got, save by the most minute ground surveys, whose expense renders them out of the question, when the large areas to be mapped in Canada are considered.”

While the DH.4B's served as reliable photographic platforms for five years (1923-1927), they were not ideal. It took



Photographer William J. Oliver, seen here in the rear cockpit of a High River DH-4 was one of southern Alberta's foremost photographers from 1910 through the 1940's.



Looking southeast to Crowsnest Mountain from a High River Air Station DH.4

up to an hour to reach an altitude of 14,000 feet. At this height, mountain turbulence often attained a vertical velocity of up to 500 feet per minute and high level winds frequently prevented any progress over the ground while cruising at 80 miles per hour. The cockpit was small, making changing film magazines an exhausting process. The observer's feet were wedged under the seat and temperatures of five to ten degrees were not uncommon at 14,000 feet.

The photographic work completed using the DH.4's was dependent upon good team work between the pilot and the photographer. The pilot devoted his whole attention to holding his altitude and maintaining the aircraft in a horizontal plane while photographs were being taken. To the photographer was left the responsibility of holding the aircraft on the correct line of flight.

During September, the High River Air Station was given the pleasant task of dropping some mail and papers at the Prince of Wales' 'EP' Ranch which was located in the foothills, near the front ranges of the mountains. H.R.H. the Prince of Wales was visiting and wet conditions prevented mail delivery by road.

The pilot recalled, "I was attached to the station carrying out forest-fire patrols over the eastern portion of the Rocky Mountains. A day or two after the arrival of H.R.H., the Commanding Officer received a request that the mail for H.R.H. be air-dropped at his ranch. I was detailed for this pleasant duty and in due course took off in a DH.4 with the mail, to which I had attached an RCAF message-bag with a multi-coloured streamer. On nearing the ranch I descended to about one hundred feet and, recognizing H.R.H. standing in an open space near his ranch house, I dropped the mail so that it would land close by. It landed a few feet in front of H.R.H. and I then observed him to walk over and pick it up, and then wave."

In October of 1924, the RCAF exercised its option to purchase the land on which the station was built and new aircraft for forestry patrol were ordered to replace the aging DH.4's. The High River Air Station was here to stay.



Visitor Day at the High River Air Station c.1924

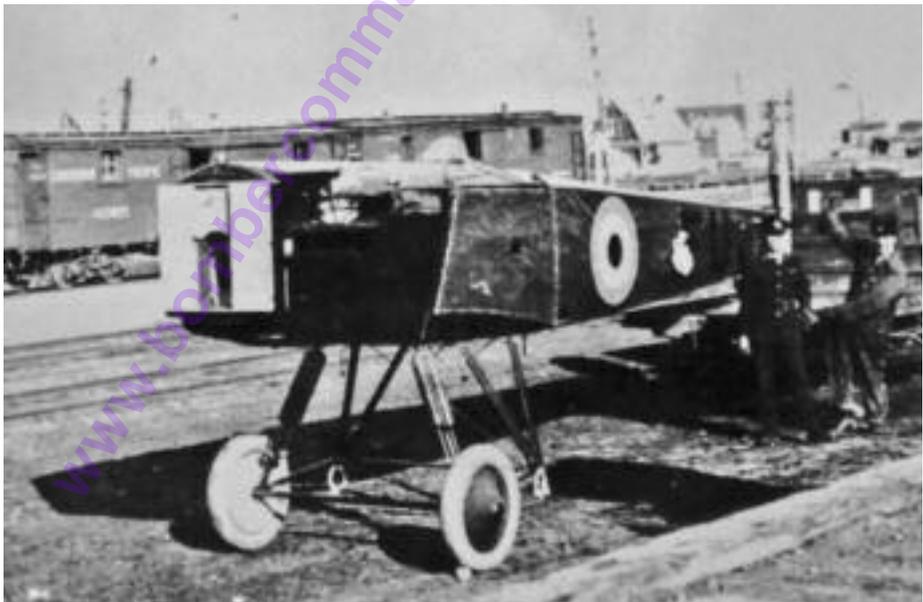
HIGH RIVER AIR STATION -1925

In 1925 the High River Air Station received five new aircraft for forestry patrols. The type was designated as an Avro 552A but commonly called the Avro Viper. Smaller and lighter than the DH.4's, the aircraft utilized the fuselage from the Avro 504 and a Wolseley Viper 210 h.p. engine. Although designed in England, these single-seater aircraft were built by Canadian Vickers in Montreal. The engines were purchased from the Aircraft Disposal Company in London, England.

The first Viper was test flown at Montreal in December of 1924 and then shipped to High River by train. The remaining four aircraft arrived at High River during March.

The station remained open for flying during the winter in order to conduct tests on the new aircraft. The tests began in late January. Initial testing indicated that the aircraft worked well. The aircraft could be operated successfully at altitudes of 14,000 feet.

The initial testing was carried out by Squadron Leader A. L. Cuffe and Flying Officer E.G. Fullerton. With the introduction of the Vipers and the introduction of new aircraft radios which had a range of two hundred miles, voice



The first Avro 552A 'Viper' being unloaded at the High River railway station in 1925 (Cpl. Harry Diller at left)



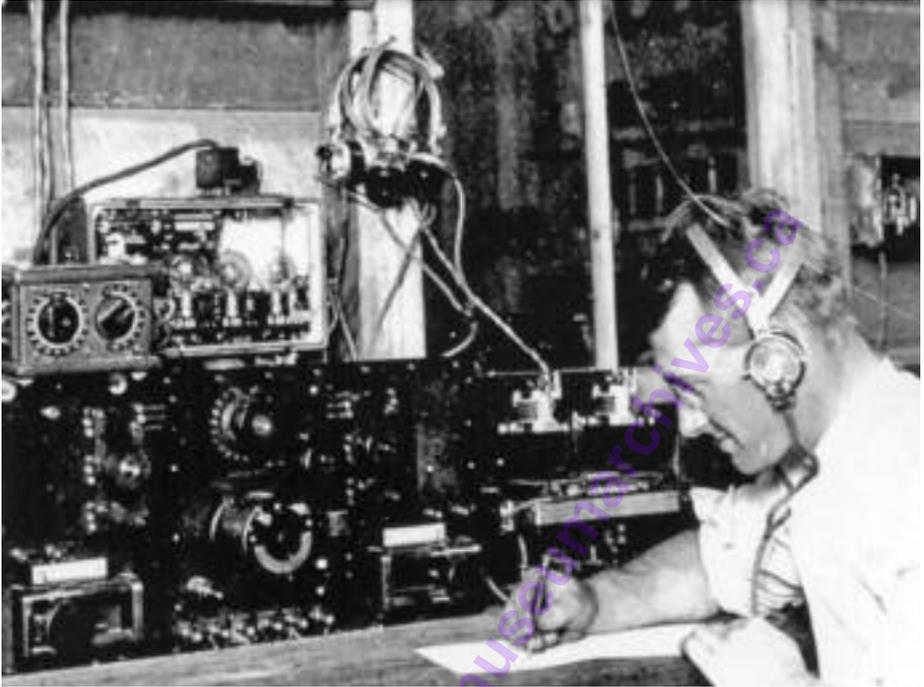
A 'Huck Mechanical Starter' being used to start an Aero Viper in 1925

communications became possible rather than by morse code. Pilots were required to make a radio report every fifteen minutes. Communications remained one way with the pilot being able to transmit to base but not vice versa. The cockpit of the Viper became more complex than the DH.4 with the addition of the radio equipment which included an antenna reel and transmitter.

The pioneering radio system that had been implemented at Morley and continued to be developed at High River was operated by W.W. 'Bill' Grant. At the outbreak of WW I, Bill joined the Canadian Army Signal Corps and went overseas with the first Canadian contingent. In England, he transferred to the Royal Flying Corps, specializing in aerial photography, radio communications and the development of electrically-heated clothing, all this in addition to serving as an observer.

Commercial radio was in its infancy when, in 1921, he started a 50 watt radio station at the High River Air Station over which western Canadians heard their first broadcasts. During September, he created a then world record by picking up a signal from Los Angeles. When, during March of the following year and utilizing the most powerful transmitter in North America at the time, Bill was able to speak with someone in Hawaii, it was hailed as, "a new, miraculous step in 'radio-phone'."

The residents of High River took a keen interest in the



W.W. 'Bill' Grant operating the radio equipment at High River in the early 1920's. He founded Calgary radio station CFCN in 1922.

wireless station when they learned that it could receive broadcasts from as far away as Los Angeles. The following year, Bill moved the station to Calgary where the call sign became CFCN. Bill Grant continued to have a financial interest in the radio station until 1936

Bill Grant made history at the High River Air Station with the first air to ground broadcast when F/Lt. E.G. Fullerton, flying a Viper, recited 'The Shooting of Dan McGrew' and had his efforts broadcast live over CFCN.

As pilots gained experience with the Viper, they began to complain about the vibration in the aircraft. Flights had to be shortened when radiator connections vibrated loose in flight, causing the engine to overheat. It became clear that this new aircraft would not be trouble free. One attempt to solve the vibration problem was to install a heavier propeller but this resulted in only a minor improvement and the vibrations continued.

The fire hazard in 1925 was again low due to snow and wet weather. As a result, a total of only 489 hours were flown on forestry patrol. The northern and southern patrols from High River were flown only when required by the District Forester. Fourteen fires were spotted from the air. Each of these was promptly dealt with due to the efficient manner in which messages could be transmitted to the forest rangers. Although this was the fifth year in a row during which fire damage to the Alberta forests was minimal, the patrols continued to be supported by the forestry authorities.

Another special flight was completed for the National Parks Branch, taking photos along the Banff-Windermere Highway which had recently been constructed through Kootenay National Park.

The High River Air Station became an international customs airport and aircraft from the United States used the airfield. One noteworthy visit in 1925 was when the Fox Film Corporation used the station as a base for the filming of 'Pyjamas' starring Olive Benton as the leading lady. For most of the silent-film, she was dressed in pajamas made out of parachute silk. Olive and her love interest had to parachute out of a plane before it crashed into the wilderness.

Two visiting 'Swallow' aircraft were involved. While at High River, the wings of one of the aircraft were painted in a checker-board pattern of six inch squares of black and white so that the aircraft could be seen while flying over Victoria Glacier behind Lake Louise. It is thought that some of the filming was actually done at the High River Air Station. The film was released in 1927.

The RCAF's military role was utilized in August when F/Lt. A. Carter was sent to Calgary to inspect the newly prepared landing field at the Sarcee Military Camp. Later that month, an aircraft under his command was sent to the Camp to participate in a co-operative artillery exercise. Military officers from the camp were given familiarization flights after which the aircraft was used for observation purposes in connection with artillery practice with live ammunition.



Fox Film Corporation 'Swallows' at High River



Swallow with checkerboard wings

Early in 1925, Flight Lieutenant A. Carter was sent to Chanute Field, Illinois to take a course in parachute jumping. The RCAF had made a decision to equip all its pilots with parachutes. F/Lt. Carter was chosen to become proficient in parachute jumping and then to pass this skill on to other RCAF personnel. Upon completing his course, F/Lt. Carter gave lectures at Camp Borden, Ottawa, and Jericho Beach. On May 7th, Carter made his first parachute jump at High River. He was taken to an altitude of 1200 feet for the jump by the legendary 'Punch' Dickins in a DH.4.



'Punch' Dickins

Clennell 'Punch' Dickins, enlisted in the Canadian Infantry in World War I, transferred to the Royal Flying Corps, and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for persistence and gallantry under fire. He joined the Canadian Air Force and then became one of the original officers of the RCAF when it was formed in 1924.

After serving at the High River Air Station, 'Punch' pioneered airmail flights and flew widely in the Canadian north, becoming the first pilot to cross the Arctic Circle. In 1942, he became vice-president and manager of Canadian Pacific Airlines while overseeing the management of six BCATP flight training schools. Following the war, he joined de Havilland as a director and vice-president, developing a world-wide sales organization that sold Canadian designed and built aircraft in over sixty countries.

On November 14th, F/O Dickins flew F/Lt. Carter to an altitude of 20,000 feet over High River in a DH.4. The aircraft had reached its maximum altitude when Carter jumped, setting a British Empire record. A Calgary Herald article described the

jump, "They took off from the High River Station and in his descent Carter drifted six miles before coming safely to earth, a few feet from the Big Lake. It took seventeen minutes from the time he dropped from the plane till he reached earth. While waiting for the ideal moment to descend, he froze his face in the upper air, and he had a vivid description of the air disturbances encountered in the breath-taking drop."



F/Lt. Carter ready for a jump



F/Lt. Carter landing near High River



F/O C. Anderson and F/Lt. Carter fold the parachute following a jump by Corporal P. Semple

HIGH RIVER AIR STATION -1926



Siskin J-7758 and J-7759 at the High River Air Station

In August of 1926, the station received two Armstrong Whitworth Siskin fighters. These aircraft were on loan from the Royal Air Force to the RCAF for winter testing, but remained in High River until early 1927.

The 1926 operations at the High River Air Station were carried out in a similar fashion to 1925, although the north landing site at Eckville was replaced by a new airstrip at Rocky Mountain House.

New wings had been fitted to the Avro Vipers prior to the start of the forestry patrols. In addition, the fuselages had been inspected and reinforced to withstand the vibration. However the problem of vibration and overheating continued. As the season wore on it became apparent that these new aircraft were not going to work out as a patrol aircraft. Fortunately the fire hazard was low during the year, and the aircraft were not in high demand for forestry patrols. According to a report on the High River operations by F.H. Hitchins, the station, "was less active in 1926, partly because of the lack of suitable aircraft and partly because of unfavourable weather."

Only 261 hours were logged for forestry patrol during 1926. In February of 1927 the five Avro Vipers were shipped to Camp Borden where they would be used for pilot training.

Courses in parachute jumping were given at High River under the direction of F/Lt. Carter. Numerous RCAF personnel made their first parachute jump under his guidance at High River during 1926.

Minor operations included the taking of motion pictures in



'Hand Chain Starting' a Viper in 1926

Banff National Park for use in publicity and exposing glass slides to trap wheat rust spores in the upper atmosphere to assist agricultural researchers working for the Department of Agriculture. They were investigating the spread of wheat rust disease over the prairie provinces.

On September 4th 1926, history was made when pilot C.J. 'Jack' Caldwell landed Vickers Viking G-CAEB at High River. This was the first ground landing of an amphibious aircraft in Canada. The aircraft had been engaged in mineral exploration by its owners, Northern Syndicate of Calgary. The company ceased operations after only one year's operation and the aircraft remained in storage at High River until it was sold in 1928.



Northern Syndicate's Vickers Viking at High River

HIGH RIVER AIR STATION -1927

On January 8th 1927, F.Lt. R. Collis and F/O 'Punch' Dickins flew the two Siskins that had been delivered to High River the previous August to Edmonton where they were to undergo winter testing. On arrival at Edmonton, the mayor and other civic officials greeted them, as it was the official opening of the Municipal Airfield. Both aircraft were flown by F/O Dickins in temperatures as low as -44 degrees Fahrenheit. The Siskins were equipped with both wheels and skis but about ninety percent of the flying was carried out on skis. Dickins was assisted by two airmen from the High River Air Station.

The aircraft were returned to High River in late March. On June 28th, tragedy struck when P/O C.M. Anderson was killed in the crash of Siskin J-7758. At the time of the accident, he had been practising formation flying in preparation for a demonstration flight over Edmonton for the Jubilee Day celebration of confederation. In August, the remaining Siskin was shipped to Camp Borden.

During June, the Highwood River was in flood. Special flights were organized during which photographs were taken of



**Siskin J-7759 being held down during an engine run-up
(l-r) Osterbauer, Davey, Elliot, Richards, and Diller**



Wreckage of Siskin J-7758



**A crated Siskin being transported to the railway station
from the High River Air Station
(l-r) Dearaway, Richards, McGandle, Anderson, Telfer, Duncan,
McDonald, A. Green, S. Green, P. Green, Diller, and Eadie**

the river banks for use by engineers to attempt to remedy the damage caused by the annual periods of high flow.

During 1927, operations at the High River Air Station were hampered by the lack of a suitable aircraft for forestry patrol. It had been expected that the Vipers would be replaced by a new forestry patrol aircraft, the Vigil. However, this project was behind schedule. As a stop gap measure the station was sent four Avro 504 aircraft.



Avro 504 west of RCAF High River



Corporal Harry Diller and an Avro 504

Forestry patrols accounted for just under half of the station's flying for 1927. Due to a low fire hazard, regular patrols were not required until October. Although no fires were reported from the aircraft patrols, the Forestry Department continued to support their use. During 1927, RCAF High River's personnel consisted of five officers and twenty-seven airmen.

H.R.H. the Prince of Wales arrived in High River on August 11th for his third visit to his ranch. Daily mail drops were made by the RCAF during his brief stay.

During the latter years of the 1920's, commercial aviation was beginning to become more of a factor at the High River Air Station. A privately owned Stinson Detroider freighted nitroglycerine, an extremely sensitive explosive, to the nearby Turner Valley oil wells. The legendary Capt. 'Freddie' McCall was the pilot.

Capt. McCall had visited High River before. On October 2nd 1919, he gave, "an exhibition of aerial prowess followed by the chance to take a joy ride in his Curtiss JN-4 'Canuck' at an 'Aeroplane Day' sponsored by the High River Times newspaper. He returned again the following August to do some more 'barn-storming'.

Freddie McCall had joined the Canadian Army in 1916 but transferred to the Royal Flying Corps, becoming a highly decorated 'Ace', with thirty enemy machines to his



Freddie McCall (second from right) off-loading canisters of nitroglycerine from his Stinson Detroider



Capt. Freddie McCall



Stinson Detroit and **Freddie McCall** at the **High River Air Station** in 1927 credit. McCall was involved in the aviation business throughout the 1920's and 1930's and then served with the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan at several western Canadian bases during World War II. When the City of Calgary opened its new airport in 1956, it was named McCall Field to honour his pioneering achievements and his outstanding military accomplishments.

Another Stinson Detroit flown by E.T. Vance arrived from Spokane during July. He was flying some oilmen to Calgary and had landed in High River to clear customs.

A Curtiss Standard J-1 belonging to Lethbridge Commercial Airways and flown by 'Jock' Palmer visited the High River Air Station during July. His aircraft required inspection by the air force personnel.

After initially serving and being wounded in the Canadian Army, John Ender Palmer was transferred to the Royal Flying Corps and was credited with nine 'victories'. Following the war, he was involved in barn-storming, stunt flying, and wing-walking adventures. He also flew passengers, did aerial advertising and aerial photography. In 1928, Palmer and Freddie McCall formed Great Western Airways. Their business included flying explosives to oilfields in Alberta, air exhibitions, and flight instruction. Palmer continued in the aviation business during the

1930's, but when the war began, he became an instructor for the Calgary Aero Club which operated No. 5 Elementary Flying Training School in Lethbridge and later in High River.



Curtiss Standard J-1 of Lethbridge Commercial Airways at the High River Air Station in 1928 for a customs inspection



Jock Palmer in 1929

HIGH RIVER AIR STATION -1928

The year 1928 brought many changes to the High River Air Station. The first involved aerial photography, which had been carried out by the station since 1920. The two DH.4's that had been used for photography were retired from service and not replaced. The Department of National Defence had decided to centralize all photography at Ottawa.

Another change resulted in new aircraft being used for forestry patrol. In 1925 the de Havilland company in England introduced the DH60 Moth aircraft. This two seater aircraft, originally powered by a sixty horsepower Cirrus engine, was designed for pilot training and sport flying. The aircraft was very economical to purchase and operate due to its low power and simple construction.

The RCAF purchased six Cirrus Moths to be used at the High River Air Station. The aircraft were fitted with new radio sets that had been developed by the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals.



Cirrus Moths

HIGH RIVER AIR STATION -1929

Three new de Havilland Gipsy Moth aircraft were received by the station in 1929. These were similar to the Cirrus Moths but powered by a 122 Horsepower Gipsy Major engine.

1078 hours of forestry patrols were flown in 1929. The temporary landing fields and refuelling facilities continued to be used at Pincher creek and Rocky Mountain House. Four fires were spotted from the patrol aircraft in this district. The first patrol of the year was flown by F/Lt. Leitch on April 12. He was accompanied on the flight by J. A. Hutchison, supervisor of the Bow River Forest Reserve.

Early in 1929 Howard Ingram was appointed Civil Aviation Inspector for the prairie region and assumed the duties previously undertaken by the RCAF. However from time to time, the RCAF personnel at High River were asked to assist Ingram in his duties.

The High River Air Station continued to have numerous visitors from the civil aviation sector in 1929. On May 19th, S/L Tudhope, a former High River Air Station pilot, accompanied by F/O A.D. McLean landed at High River in a Pitcairn Mailwing. They were investigating possible landing sites for the proposed air-mail route from Winnipeg to Vancouver.

On May 27th, a Western Canada Airways Fokker Super Universal arrived from Winnipeg in order to take photographs of the Turner Valley region for Imperial Oil company. The aircraft was flown by P. B. Calder, an ex-High River Air Station pilot. The photographer, Fred Little, had also served at High River.

On July 21st, a Western Canada Airways Fokker Tri-motor flown by W. L. Brintnell, arrived at High River. The aircraft was being flown from Winnipeg to Vancouver via Edmonton on an inspection trip. Later that month, the aircraft made a short stop at High River on its return to Winnipeg. On August 7th, Major General J. H. MacBrien, the president of the Aviation League of Canada, landed at High River in a Gypsy Moth. On September 16th, Captain J.D. Parkinson landed at the station in a Curtiss Robin. Howard Ingram, the Civil Aviation Inspector from Regina, visited the station in June and July.



Fokker Super Universal at High River in 1929



RCAF personnel at High River in 1929

HIGH RIVER AIR STATION -1930

The High River Air Station operated five Moths and one Fairchild FC2 during 1930. The Fairchild was the first monoplane and cabin type aircraft to serve at High River. It had an enclosed cockpit and arrived from Winnipeg during August.

Early in the year, the High River Air Station was utilized as the base for a series of flights by S/Ldr. Tudhope, a former High River forestry patrol pilot. Airmail was being flown as far west as Calgary and the Post Office was anxious to establish a route through the mountains to Vancouver.

S/Ldr. Tudhope had been selected to investigate the possibility of a route through the Crowsnest Pass, including the selection a series of emergency landing fields.

A total of 720 hours were recorded with forestry patrols over the Bow River, Crowsnest, and Clearwater Forest Reserves continuing as in previous years. Five fires were reported by station aircraft. A sub-base at Grande Prairie was utilized from which High River Air Station aircraft spotted forty-one fires.

During one of the operations from Grande Prairie, a Gypsy Moth flown by F/O Spradbrow made a forced landing thirty miles south of High Prairie after the engine failed. There were no injuries but the aircraft was damaged when it overturned. The owner of the field in which the aircraft landed was



Fairchild FC2

not pleased and later claimed \$7.50 in damages to his crop of oats.

On October 27th, the Alberta Air Circus arrived at High River. Five aircraft from Calgary attended and put on an exhibition of stunt flying. This was followed by the giving of airplane rides. A novel feature included the crowning of a 'Queen of the Air'. The honour was conferred on Miss Ruth Sexsmith, who obtained the most votes by selling tickets for airplane rides.

Three days later, on October 30th, the natural resources of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, including forestry, were transferred from the federal government to the provincial governments. So now, if the RCAF at High River were to continue forestry patrols in 1931, the contract would have to be with the Province of Alberta.



In 1929, this 'Lookout' was built on the summit of Mount Burke, a front range peak west-southwest of High River.

HIGH RIVER AIR STATION -1931 to 1940

At the beginning of 1931, there was much uncertainty as to the future of the High River Air Station but it remained open with F/O G.R. Spradbrow in charge assisted by one officer and seven airmen. Some flight testing continued, but with the Government of Canada having transferred responsibility for natural resources to the provinces, the main reason for the operation of the High River Air Station no longer existed. The province was in the process of developing a series of 'look-outs' along the eastern slopes of the Rockies and was not interested in the continuation of the forest protection flights.

On March 31st, F/O Spradbrow was transferred to Camp Borden and the High River Air Station was placed on a 'care and maintenance' status. All personnel, with exception of a watchman, were either transferred or released from service. The remaining Moth aircraft were flown to Winnipeg. The station was then only used by occasional visiting aircraft, for the storage of surplus aircraft belonging to the RCAF, and as an emergency landing field.

Prior to the departure of the RCAF, the Town of High River hosted a gala 'Air Force Ball'. The High River Times wrote that, "Few people realize how important the work of the forest patrol was in safe-guarding the water courses." Another article stated that the closure was, "a real loss to the town, not only in prestige and business, but more particularly in citizenship. The officers and men were highly popular, entering into all town recreations, and contributing much to sport and social life.

The personnel at the High River Air Station had played an important role, not only in the community but also in the pioneering days of the Canadian Air Force.

While the station was officially closed, it was visited from time to time by military and civil aircraft. In many cases, aircraft using the station did so in order to carry out aerial photography. During May 1939, two RCAF Bellanca Pacemakers arrived in High River to take photographs of the Banff area. In the summer of 1939, a Canadian Airways Fairchild 71 arrived at the High River airfield. The aircraft was on contract to the Department of Mines and Natural Resources to conduct a photo survey of the

Old Man River.

During September 1939, when the RCAF's #1 Fighter Squadron was moved from Calgary to St. Hubert, Quebec, the three remaining Siskin fighter aircraft that they had been using were flown to the High River Air Station where they were put into storage.

The station remained on 'care and maintenance' until 1941, when the Royal Canadian Air Force returned to High River.



Les Shears mowing the grass at the High River Air Station in 1939

THE BRITISH COMMONWEALTH AIR TRAINING PLAN (BCATP)

As the focus of a Commonwealth-wide effort to instruct aircrew, Canada made a major contribution to Allied air superiority during World War II. The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan was referred to as the "Aerodrome of Democracy" by US President Roosevelt. Canada was able to play this important role because it had an abundance of air training space beyond the range of enemy aircraft, excellent climatic conditions for flying, immediate access to American industry, and relative proximity to the British Isles via the North Atlantic.

Canada had been the location of a major recruitment and training organization during the First World War and Britain looked to it again when war began again in 1939. To Prime Minister King, the scheme had the advantages of keeping large numbers of Canadians at home and avoiding the raising of a large expeditionary force. Canada agreed to accept most of the plan's costs but insisted that the British agree that air training would take precedence over other aspects of the Canadian war effort. The British expected that their Royal Air Force would absorb Canadian air training graduates as in the First World War, but King demanded that distinct Royal Canadian Air Force squadrons be formed.

The construction of the training schools was a massive undertaking in itself. On the prairies, farmer's fields were transformed in a matter of a few months into operational schools. This involved the levelling and paving of runways, taxiways, and tarmacs, the building of several huge hangars and dozens of other buildings for accommodating, teaching, and providing other services to the young airmen, as well as the installation of electrical, water, sewage, and other services.

Almost overnight, an aircraft construction industry was developed to provide the thousands of aircraft necessary. As just one example of this, 1832 twin-engined Avro Anson Mk II's were built at factories in Nova Scotia and Ontario during the war.

At the plan's peak, 94 schools operating at 231 sites across Canada, 10,840 aircraft were involved, and the ground organization numbered 104,113 men and women. Three



BCATP hangar under construction at 31 EFTS De Winton, Alberta

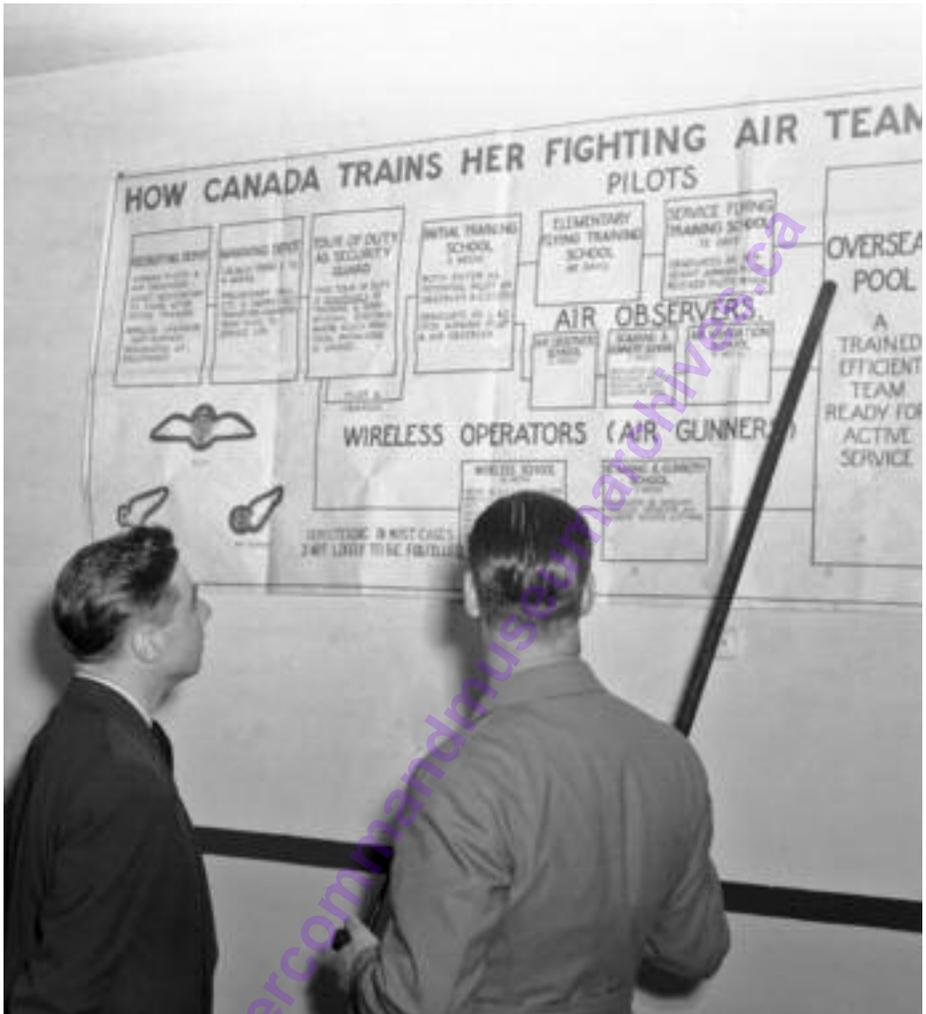
thousand trainees graduated each month. At a cost of more than \$1.6 billion, 131,553 pilots, navigators, bomb aimers, wireless operators, air gunners, and flight engineers were graduated.

Recruits began their air force career with a four week posting to a Manning Depot where they learned the basics of military life. From there they proceeded to an Initial Training School where mathematics, navigation, aerodynamics, and other subjects were studied. Their results here determined their next posting, some being considered suitable for flying training and others for navigation or wireless schools.

The first step for those who qualified for pilot training was a posting to an Elementary Flying Training School (EFTS). An eight week course involved all aspects of basic flight and navigation and about fifty hours of flying in the single engined 'primary' training aircraft such as Fleet Fawns, Fleet Finches, de Havilland Tiger Moths, and later in the war, Fairchild Cornells.

Successful graduates of an EFTS would be posted to a Service Flying Training School (SFTS) where students were expected to improve their navigational skills, master instrument and night flying, and participate in formation flying exercises.

Most faced the challenge of adapting to flying larger, twin-engined aircraft such as the Avro Anson or Cessna Crane. Pilots who were judged to be suited to flying fighter aircraft flew the single-engined Harvard aircraft, much more powerful and demanding than the aircraft at EFTS. Upon graduation from an SFTS, the pilot was ready to continue his training at an Operational Training Unit (OTU), generally in Britain.



Explaining the options to a new recruit

Other aircrew were assigned to BCATP schools devoted to their speciality such as navigation, wireless, and bombing and gunnery schools where a variety of aircraft were used in their training.

The presence of the BCATP base had a major effect on the nearby communities, not the least of which was providing a sizeable economic boost for towns, most of which had still not recovered from the depression of the Thirties. The airforce personnel were generally made welcome and participated with the civilian population in various sporting, cultural, and social events both on the base and off. Inevitably romances developed

and the concluding report of the BCATP reported that more than 3750 Canadian girls had married members of foreign air forces who had been stationed in Canada.

With the massive presence in the Country of the BCATP, the RCAF was seen to be the service of choice for tens of thousands of young Canadians and of the total graduates of the Plan, 55% were Canadians with the others being primarily Britons, Australians, and New Zealanders. As the war progressed, this major commitment to the air war overseas, and particularly to Bomber Command, inevitably exacted a very heavy toll in Canadian casualties during operations.



Graduation Ceremony at 15 Service Flying Training School at Claresholm

No. 5 ELEMENTARY FLYING TRAINING SCHOOL (LETHBRIDGE)

One autumn evening in 1927, a group of aviation enthusiasts met in the Navy Club Rooms above the Fire Hall on Second Street East in Calgary and formed the Calgary Aero Club. Members flew from a field near what is now the intersection of 17th Avenue and Sarcee Trail SW. The club's enthusiastic and active membership grew rapidly and by 1929 was the largest flying club in Canada and the second largest in world. When the Second World War began, it remained of the largest flying club in the British Empire.



With one exception, the BCATP Elementary Flying Training Schools, including No. 5 EFTS, were operated by civilian organizations under contract to the Canadian Department of Defence. They employed civilian personnel for aircraft servicing and maintenance, airfield and building maintenance, food services, ground school instruction, office and accounting, medical and dental services, recreation facilities, security, and, in most cases flying instructors, although by 1943 there was an increased utilization of RCAF instructors.

The RCAF retained authority over all service personnel including the student-pilots, with a Base Commanding Officer and supporting service staff. The Chief Flying Instructors were RCAF or RAF officers.

Each of the flying clubs in Canada were offered the opportunity to operate an elementary flying training school and in 1939, the Calgary Aero Club agreed to participate.

In early 1940, the Calgary Aero Club was advised that they would be operating a school at Lethbridge. Those in charge of the club at the time were of the opinion that the high wind conditions at Lethbridge were not suitable for elementary training and recommended to the government that, if the school could not be located in Calgary, it should be located in High River.

However, their recommendation was not accepted.

Construction began on the buildings for the school at Kenyon Field, just outside the City of Lethbridge, and the Calgary Aero Club was advised that it would commence training at Lethbridge on July 29th 1940.

The managing director of 5 EFTS from its opening in Lethbridge in 1940, until its closure in High River in 1944

was Dennis K. Yorath. Dennis had a connection to the High River aerodrome, having taken his test for a pilot's license at the High River Air Station in 1928. His father had been the first president of the Calgary Aero Club when it was formed in 1927. Dennis was a charter member of the club and served as vice-president.

Dennis remained active with the organization until after the war when he began to play a nationally significant role with the Royal Canadian Flying Clubs Association. Dennis Yorath was named a member of Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame in 1973 with the following citation, "His business management abilities, coupled with a far-sighted appreciation of the country's civil flying requirements, were a prime factor in establishing a national pilot training scheme that has substantially benefited Canadian aviation."

Initially, all the Flying Instructors were civilians, with a dark blue uniform that had non-RCAF brass buttons. Most of the staff were civilians although many of the younger instructors transferred to the RCAF. In many cases this made little difference as, upon joining the air force they were immediately placed on long-term leave and went to work for the flying school. Following the closure of the station, they were then discharged from the RCAF. Uniforms of the civilians at the school resembled those of the RCAF trainees and instructors.

High winds in the Lethbridge area did indeed prove to be a problem. In fact, many landings were accomplished by 'bulldogging' the light, Tiger Moth aircraft. Ground crews on



Dennis Yorath



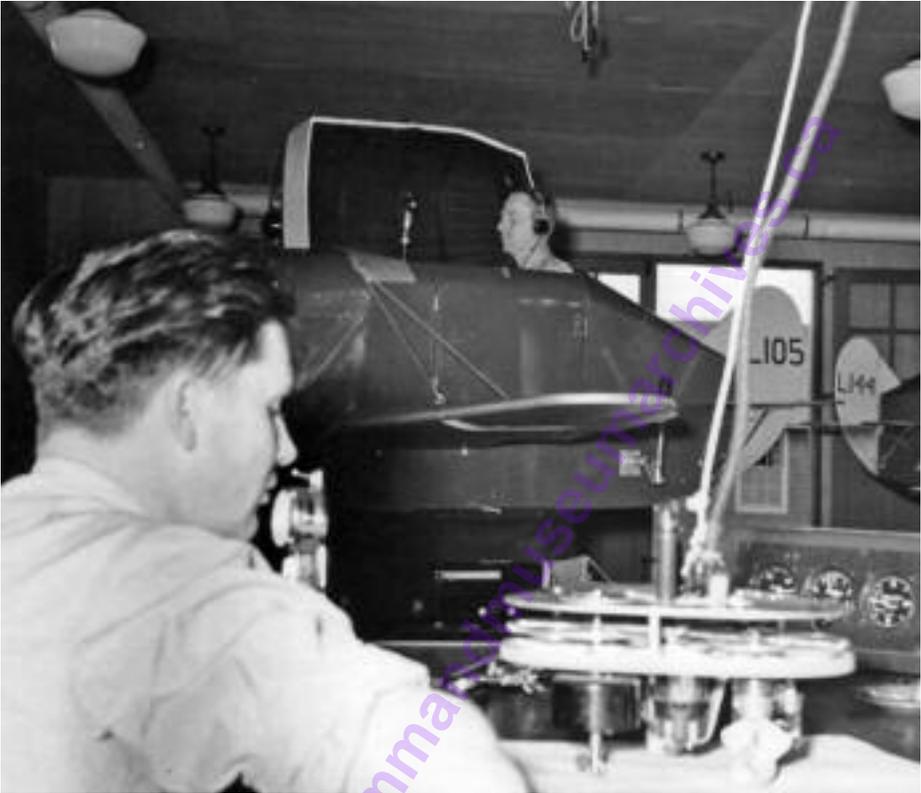
**Original 5 EFTS instructors at Lethbridge
'Jock' Palmer is third from the left.**

either side of the aircraft would reach out and steady the wings as the aircraft landed into a strong headwind with very little groundspeed. They continued to hang on in order to assist the pilot in taxiing back to the hangars.

Although 5 EFTS was operating at Lethbridge, the members of the Calgary Aero Club continued to have the High River location in mind. During November the wind at Lethbridge, "rose to seventy-two miles per hour, and the senior class was seventeen days behind schedule with only fourteen days of the course left. Flying time was badly needed, so sixty-one pupils, instructors, and staff boarded planes and trucks and migrated to High River.

As the convoy neared town, the wind abated and everyone swore they would, 'fly the props off the Tigers' the next day. That night a blizzard struck. The next morning was clear and frosty and it took two hours to get the aircraft started, since the old Bessonneau hangars in which the aircraft had been placed overnight had no heat in them. That afternoon everyone returned to Lethbridge where at least there was warmth in the hangars.

Early in January 1941, it was announced that 5 EFTS would be moving to High River. A great deal of construction and other work would have to be done to house the EFTS and it was hoped it would be ready for operations by June 1st.



Carl Jones instructing a student in a Link Trainer. The Link Trainer was an early flight-simulator that allowed students to develop basic and instrument flying skills while safely on the ground.

5 EFTS HIGH RIVER -1941

-NOTE TO READER-

This story of 5 Elementary Flying Training School's time at High River is told largely by Carl Jones. After completing a degree in mechanical engineering at McGill University, Carl became involved with the Calgary Aero Club. He was the Chief Ground Instructor at the school from its opening in July 1940 at Lethbridge until its closure in November 1944 at High River. Carl's text is taken from an illustrated booklet that he compiled as the School was being closed.

Quotations from the school's official RCAF 'Daily Diary' have been placed within Carl's story. As well, I have added additional information and elaborated on Carl's story and the 'Daily Diaries' as indicated by the text that is italicized. Other material, as noted, is taken from the work of L. Nuttall that was completed in 1987.

STATION DIARY: May 1, 1941

Organizational Order 123 was issued:

REFORMATION AND RELOCATION OF No. 5 ELEMENTARY FLYING TRAINING SCHOOL

INFORMATION: It has now become necessary to move No. 5 Elementary Flying Training School from Lethbridge, Alberta to High River, Alberta and convert it to a double elementary flying training school. Lethbridge will become a bombing and gunnery school upon the completion of the present building program. No. 5 EFTS is to move to High River and reform as a double elementary flying training school in time to reopen by June 21, 1941.

[Bombing and Gunnery Schools utilized heavier, more powerful aircraft that were better able to handle the high winds. The above order specified that forty-eight Tiger Moths were to be available in High River when the school reopened with an additional twelve to be delivered by July 15th.]



[According to L. Nuttall, who documented the effect of the BCATP on High River,

“The arrival of the air base had a tremendous effect upon the town’s economy and society. The association between the town and base of High River started well and then improved during the forty-three months of the school’s existence. It was a model relationship which stood as a tribute to the warmth and hospitality of the townspeople and the good sense, restraint, and extraordinary gift for public relations demonstrated by the civilian leadership of the flying school.

“The decision to build and operate a flying school just outside High River had a dramatic effect upon the local economy. Housing facilities proved inadequate, real estate values increased, unemployment vanished and prices rose sharply. Building began in April 1941, and by May, work was reported to be progressing well. The station was quite large. In addition to a large main hangar, a gymnasium, guard house, barracks, classrooms, storehouse and messes were necessary.

“A reporter described the trainee’s mess in some detail: ‘It is furnished for comfort and in harmony of colour, a real home away from home. There is a writing desk, a radio and reading material . . . the plates, cups and saucers are in air force blue

and made at the pottery plant in Medicine Hat. Facilities for indoor games are not neglected. In addition, a steam heating plant was built which required the construction of a gas pipe line, a major project which delayed the opening of the base.

“An advance party arrived in May and The High River Times printed their request to rent thirteen five and six bedroom houses. These were not forthcoming and the airmen found themselves in basement suites or single bed rooms in private homes with family member doubling up.

“Recognizing that local housing was insufficient, the Town Council proposed to subdivide vacant land near the river into building lots and urged newcomers to buy the sites and construct houses on them. Further, they announced that on less attractive land, not yet hooked up to the expanded sewage line, that ‘tourist cabins might be built near the river in anticipation of the military arrivals.’

“Taking advantage of the town's new prominence, the Council commenced a campaign to persuade the provincial government to upgrade the main street. After some weeks of haggling, provincial officials capitulated and the road was paved by August.

“Temporary employment was generated by the construction of the base, but permanent jobs were created by the use of local people as clerks, janitors, caterers and mechanics to service the base. Below a headline which read, ‘Local Boys Secure Jobs at School’ was a photograph showing Tom Carscadden, the son of a respected High River teacher, working on the engine of a Tiger Moth. In the same edition, ads were published requesting more stenographic help for the base.

“The town's movie theatre, drug store, hotel and beer parlour flourished in the newly buoyant economy. Local farmers began to build up their dairy herds and the High River Creamery secured the contract to supply the base with its products and launched an expansion of its operations. The increase in job opportunities resulted in a novel and severe shortage of manpower.”]

The first of June came and went, and the buildings at High River were still far from finished. The additional Tiger Moth aircraft that would be required for a 'double school' were being shipped to High River by train. A crew was sent from Lethbridge to assemble them.



Assembling Tiger Moths in one of the Bessonneau hangars

STATION DIARY: June 27, 1941

Class 29 flew to High River, leaving Lethbridge at 0430 hours. F/O E.R. Hoover, F/O B.C. Taylor, F/O V.M. Terry, Sgt. C.W. Fines, Sgt. G.L. Kirby, and Cpl D.H. Glazier reported to High River.

On June 28, the move was made to High River and was completed in the one day. Although it involved a great deal of extra work, everything went off smoothly, and Sunday morning found the school operating from the new field. Conditions at first were little better than they were at Lethbridge a year previous.

There were no roads, the ditches were open, and the whole station was a sea of mud. The hangar was far from complete and only two of the barracks had water turned on. On arrival it was found that there was no gas or water turned on into the kitchen, so everyone ate picnic lunches until these services were completed. George Andrew had to bribe the contractor's



5 EFTS Tiger Moth line-up on the grass

men before the job was finished. As soon as they decided they had done enough for the day, and wanted to quit, George appeared with a case of beer and the work went on.

STATION DIARY: June 29, 1941

Flying was in progress for the first time at High River commencing at 0600 hours and continuing all day. The only water supply was in the airmen's quarters. All messing was handled in the airmen's quarters as other quarters were not complete.

The aircraft that had been used at Lethbridge and that were flown to High River were de Havilland 82C Tiger Moths. With a wingspan of twenty-nine feet four inches, the Tiger Moth was a graceful, rather delicate looking biplane, with a perspex coupe top to cover the two tandem seats. It weighed only 1115 pounds empty, and had a 145 horsepower, gravity fed, inverted Gipsy Major engine, which was extremely reliable. Being Training Command aircraft, they were painted the standard shade of yellow.

Our first official inspection took place ten days after our arrival when Mr. J.L. Apedaile, followed by Air Commodore

Cowley visited us. They could hardly have been impressed by the appearance of the station; it was still pretty much in a turmoil. Flying was being carried on from the old Bessonneau hangars and it was actually a month before operations could be moved to the new hangar.

As the weeks went by, the station began to settle down. The roads were complete and hard surfaced, and our own carpenters and painters were working steadily on the buildings. The increase in the size of the station meant that more personnel were required, and all through this period there was a steady growth in the number of employees on the station. This was particularly true at the hangar.

STATION DIARY: July 9, 1941

At approximately 1815 hours, Tiger Moth #4296 crashed two miles northwest of Okotoks killing T/Sgt. J.A. Malin (instructor) and LAC J.W. Daly (pupil).

[A series of aerobatic manoeuvres were being carried out at roughly 2500 feet and lower, when the aircraft stalled inverted and went into an unrecoverable stall.]

STATION DIARY: July 11, 1941

At 1930 hours an escort party and pallbearers escorted the body of R92059 LAC J.W. Daly from the undertaking parlours to the southbound train. The remains were bound for Los Angeles, California, the home of his parents.

[Some 9000 young Americans joined the Royal Canadian Air Force prior to the United States being attacked and entering World War II.]

[During July 1941, a unique pair of students arrived at 5 EFTS for pilot training. They were identical twins -Douglas and Bruce Warren.

Douglas Warren recalled, "On the 14th of July 1941, we left Regina at 6:35 pm by train to travel to High River, Alberta. On the way to High River we travelled through Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, MacLeod, Claresholm, and Nanton arriving at High River about 11:00 am. It was interesting to us to go through

Nanton, for that is where we were born in 1922. It was easy to see our former home which was located not far from the railway station.

It was programmed by the training staff that students at EFTS would get fifty hours flying time in forty-nine days. I first flew at High River on the 18th of July with the instructor we had been assigned to. His name was Dusenbury, a small, dark-complexioned American from Los Angeles. Like many Americans, he came to



The Warren Twins on the day that both soloed

Canada with previous flying experience and was directed to become an instructor. Since we were both allocated to Dusenbury, he was surprised to find us as twins rather than two unrelated men whose last names happened to be the same. So it was a new experience for Dusenbury to suddenly find himself with two students that he could not tell apart.]

STATION DIARY: July 18, 1941

Another unfortunate accident caused the death of LAC F.F.S. Oldham in Tiger Moth #4078 ten miles east of the aerodrome at 1840 hours while on solo practice.

[The aircraft struck the ground at a shallow angle and caught fire. Not the best start to the school's flying at High River with three fatalities within ten days. Six airmen had been killed during the eleven months that the school had operated at Lethbridge.]

STATION DIARY: July 22, 1941

A full-time flying day. The roads around the buildings are almost ready for hard surfacing. Work has commenced on the erection of the flagpole, directly in front of the north entrance to the administrative building.

STATION DIARY: September 23, 1941

The opening day and this Station is a hive of excitement. Huge crowds gathered around 1100 hours. At approximately 1500 hours A/M Garrod, A/C Cowley, A/C Leckie, G/C Banting, G/C Lord Douglas Hamilton and F/O W.R. Hamilton on arrival in a Lockheed were escorted to the reviewing stand directly in front of which were formed the trainees in a hollow square. The Macleod Air Force band in charge of F/O W.W. Coghill paraded on the right of the squadron.

The official opening of the school took place on the 23rd day of September, 1941, attended by 2500 people from the surrounding district. The event was a tremendous success in every way. Air Marshal Garrod, the Air Member for Training in Great Britain, gave an address in which he referred to the fine work of the school and the high quality of the graduates and concluded by declaring the school open as No. 5 EFTS. This was followed by a march past of the RCAF led by Flight Lieutenant Gladden, Air Marshal Garrod taking the salute.

The most spectacular event of the day, despite very bad weather, was the flying display put on by the instructors after the march past. Bill Roy, Homer Thomson, Max Davidson, Jack Blakely and Joe Patton were among those who took part. The Tiger Moths really took a beating, and almost every regulation in



The 'Marchpast' at 5 EFTS's Opening Day ceremonies.



**The 'Reviewing Stand' on 5 EFTS's Opening Day
(l-r) D.K. Yorath, C.W. Roenisch (President of the Company), Senator
D.E. Riley, Air Marshal Garrod, Mayor H.B. MacLeod, G/C Lord Douglas
Hamilton, A/C T. Cowley**

C.A.P. 100 was shattered. Bill Smith missed a lot of the fun. He was flying Roy Lomheim and couldn't get in on it until after Roy made his fine parachute jump.

[In 1931, Roy Lomheim of Lethbridge started his career as one of Canada's finest early parachutists. Barnstorming across western Canada, his favourite stunt was to leap from a plane at about 2000 feet, open one parachute, cut it free, and then after a free fall, open a second. He specialized in landing in very small, restricted areas and performing during high winds. Ron was in charge of the parachute section at 5 EFTS.]



Ron Lomheim

*[L. Nuttall wrote of the event,
"The opening of the base was notable for the extent in which it attempted to involve the townsfolk. This was perceived as a courteous gesture in public relations and set the form for the future.*

“About 2,500 civilians turned out for the opening and were pleased to observe that their Town Council was prominently seated on the platform with the other honoured guests. Mayor W.A. Macleod was invited to speak and, after taking note of the courtesy extended to the townspeople by the military, welcomed them to their 'new home on the prairies.' That night a public dinner was given by the Chamber of Commerce in the Elk's Hall followed by a dance to which all RCAF personnel were invited as guests of the town.”

“The following day, representatives of twenty-one local organizations were convened by the president of the local chapter of the IODE to meet with the civilian manager of the base, D.K. Yorath, and the RCAF supervisor, F/L S. Gladden, to ask what help could be given in organizing suitable recreation for the trainees. Apart from the obvious suggestion that dances and opportunities to meet the local girls were appropriate, Mr. Yorath sensibly noted that most of the trainees were very young and would undoubtedly miss their families. The women present then formed a committee to work with the base officials in organizing family meetings with the trainees and in arranging social events and weekend passes for the airmen.

“Thus a pattern was established early whereby the townsfolk of High River would invite homesick young boys into their homes on the weekends. In turn, this often led to very close relationships as parents with sons overseas in the forces transferred their mothering instincts to boys of the same age.

“The associations fostered by the people of High River with their temporary foster sons was not a superficial one. The town followed the careers of many of their graduates with pride and reported their deaths with sorrow.”]



At the end of September there was still no heat installed in the hangar and with the chilly mornings, it was getting very difficult to start the aircraft.

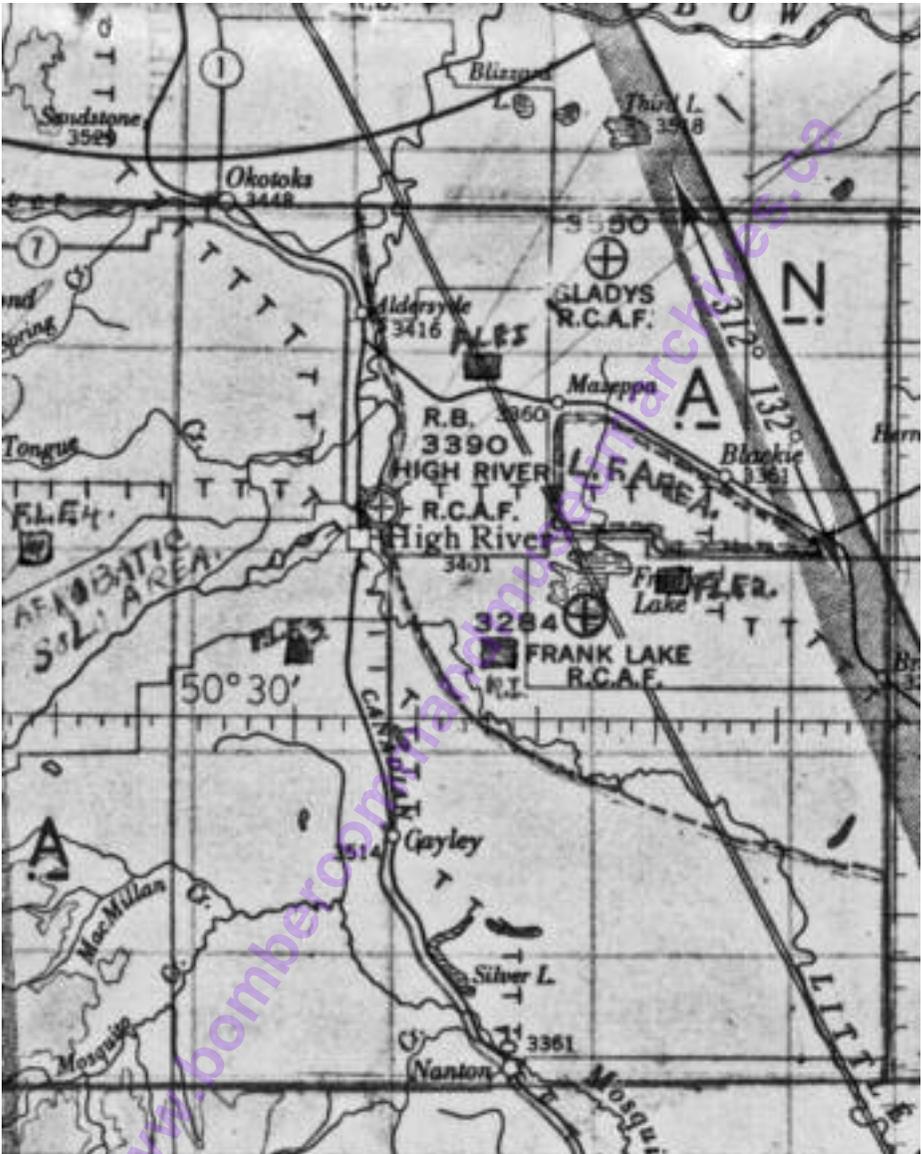
Just about this time we lost three of our more daring flight instructors, Tomlinson, Mortinson, and Pilchard. Tomlinson was well known as the man who brought back the wheat in his Tiger Moth and Pilchard chased some ducks so successfully that he caught up with them and cracked the leading edge of his wing. They were high flying ducks too. He claimed to have run into them accidentally while flying at 2000 feet.

[The instructors had been transferred to other stations. Many, perhaps most airmen, including instructors, could not resist the temptation of unauthorized low-flying to which these instructors obviously succumbed.]

A rather unique feature of this station is the naming of the streets. The street which fronts the administration building is called Garrod Drive in honour of Air Marshal Garrod DFC, who officially declared the station open. All the others have been given the names of famous Canadian aces of the last war, so we have Bishop Drive, Brown Street, and all the others.



**The Administrative Building at 5 EFTS.
The street sign indicates 'Bishop Drive'.**



Wartime aeronautical map of the High River area. Note the penciled in areas for aerobatic solo and low-flying practice.



Looking south to 5 Elementary Flying Training School soon after it was established. The three Bessonneau hangars are at left.

STATION DIARY: October 3, 1941

At 1430 hours the RCAF officers of this unit were invited to attend the showing of "Sergeant York" in the Prince of Wales Theatre in High River, Alberta as guests of His Royal Highness The Duke of Windsor. A guard of honour in charge of F/Lt. R.R. Livermore waited at the entrance and gave the royal salute as the Duke and Duchess drove up. Then the invited guests followed His Highness into the theatre where an interesting film was enjoyed.

[After a cross Canada tour in 1919 during which he was hosted by George Lane at the Bar U Ranch, Edward, Prince of Wales, decided to buy his own ranch in southern Alberta.

His visit in 1941 was one of several he made to his 'EP' Ranch that was located on Pekisko Creek, southwest of Longview. The 'EP' brand used on the ranch stood for 'Edward Prince'.]



The Duke and Duchess of Windsor entering the Wales Theatre

STATION DIARY: October 8, 1941

The Duke of Windsor arrived for his visit to the station at the specified hour in company with A/C A.T.N. Cowley, G/C D. Greig, F/L R.F. Gladden and the manager, Mr. D.K. Yorath and made a hurried round of the Station.

STATION DIARY: October 10, 1941

Air Commodore A.T.N. Cowley made the annual inspection of this station.

[Amongst other things, the inspection report noted that, "The attitude of civilian instructors is not conducive to good conduct by the pupils as they are too willing to fraternize with their students and as a result the deportment of the airmen deteriorates."]

STATION DIARY: October 17, 1941

In the evening the trainees were given the first dance on the station. Local girls were provided by organizations in the town. The music was supplied by the station and proved very satisfactory. Coffee and refreshments were served at 2200 hours.

The weather during the remainder of October was very bad, and we found ourselves farther behind schedule than at any time since the start of the school. This condition was improved somewhat by the extension of the course from seven weeks to eight. At this time Jock Palmer celebrated his twenty-fifth anniversary of going solo.

It was just another working day for Jock, and he kept right on doing solo checks and progress tests. During one of these the student made quite a good circuit and approach, but as soon as the wheels touched the ground he applied full brakes. The result was inevitable -the Tiger went right over on its back. Jock sat there, upside-down, and the air was blue as he exhausted his repertoire of profanity.



Looking southwest towards High River from the roof of the hangar

STATION DIARY: November 4, 1941

A serious crash occurred at 1000 hours this morning, when T/Sgt. H.C. Hayes (instructor) was killed and LAC R.D. Nichols (student) was seriously injured approximately ten miles southeast of the aerodrome.

[The aircraft was seen at about 500 feet making a gentle turn to the port. It then went into a spin to starboard. The aircraft crashed ten miles east of High River after having insufficient altitude to recover.]

November came along with high winds and snowstorms, and still there was no heat in the hangar. It was almost an all-day job to get the aircraft started and the flying time suffered as a result. Finally, on the 16th of November, the heat was turned on in the hangar. The heat came on just in time, for shortly afterwards, there was a period of very high winds accompanied by icing conditions and low ceiling.

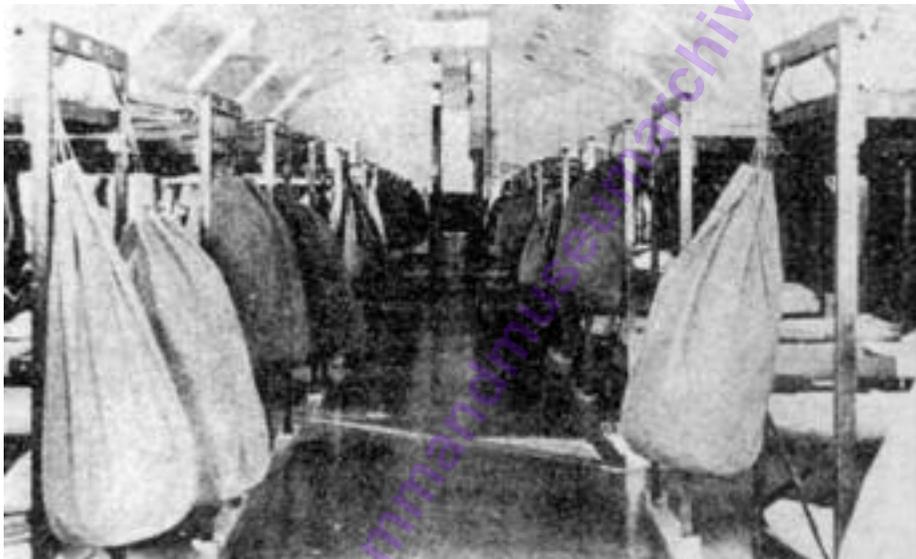
In December we had a very high percentage of American students on the station who were known as the Foreign Legion or the Royal California Air Force. At this time the Japs struck at Pearl Harbour, and there was consternation among the "Yank" students. They figured the fastest way to get back home was to

'wash out' here. The course set an all-time high for washouts, ten flying, ten ground school and seven requests.

STATION DIARY: December 29, 1941

Tiger Moth #4090 piloted by LAC K.K. McLaughlin crashed at the forced landing field at 1600 hours. LAC McLaughlin was killed.

[LAC McLaughlin was the fifth airman to be killed during the first six months of 5 EFTS's operation at High River.]



Students' barracks. Note double bunks and 'kit bags'.



5 EFTS Tiger Moths in late 1941



5 EFTS Tiger Moths



Carl Jones in the back-seat of a Tiger Moth



De Havilland Tiger Moth

5 EFTS HIGH RIVER -1942

William Watson 'Bill' Smith was a Calgary Aero Club member who had been part of the group that had established 5 EFTS in Lethbridge where he became the school's Chief Flying Instructor. Early in 1942, F/Lt. Smith was appointed as Commanding Officer of the RCAF personnel on the station. Jock Palmer was appointed Chief Flying Instructor.



S/L W.W. 'Bill' Smith

Bill Roy and Homer Thomson were the first of the original, civilian instructors to receive their RCAF wings. These two instructors had completed a Ground School course and flying tests and were then posted to a Service Flying Training School to obtain their wings prior to being posted back here.

In February, the student population was again increased, and there was a corresponding increase in staff. We then had twice as many flying instructors as there had been pupils at Lethbridge when we first opened the school.

STATION DIARY: February 3, 1942

An invitation was extended to officers and their wives of this station from the proprietor of the Wales Theatre to see the picture currently showing, 'Target for Tonight'.



['Target for Tonight' was a British documentary film billed as, "filmed and acted by the Royal Air Force, all while under fire." The film is about the crew of a Wellington bomber participating in a successful bombing mission over Germany, the squadron returning with no aircraft being lost. It won an honorary Academy Award in 1942 as 'Best Documentary'.

Sadly, most of the flight officers and crew who appeared in the film did not survive the war. Most of the young pilots who trained at High River would go on to become bomber pilots whose chance of surviving a tour of thirty operations were fifty percent at best and often far less.]

An accident on February 12th resulted in the death of Sgt. George Campbell who was well-known to all of the staff. George had come to Lethbridge with the company and spent several months as a signals instructor, at the end of which time he entered the RCAF and was trained as a flying instructor.

Sgt. Campbell had been the instructor aboard Tiger Moth 4995 that was involved in a mid-air collision with Cessna Crane 8661 from 15 Service Flying Training School (Claresholm). His student, LAC D.J. Dawson was also killed. The Tiger Moth crashed and burned one half mile south of Stavely. The Crane, flown by LAC A.E. Anderson, managed to make it home and was repaired.

STATION DIARY: February 18, 1942

An unfortunate aircraft accident occurred this morning at 0955 hours near the main aerodrome when LAC M. Huculak crashed his plane and seriously injured himself. His mother was notified at once.

[After taking off at High River, Tiger Moth 4094 got caught in the slipstream of the aircraft ahead of him. LAC Huculak made a climbing turn at 500 feet to get out of it. While doing so, his aircraft stalled and power spun into a field adjacent to the main aerodrome.]

STATION DIARY: February 19, 1942

LAC M. Huculak took a turn for the worse and he was rushed to Col. Belcher Hospital in Calgary in the afternoon. He died at 2012 hours.

[Murray Peden is the author of 'A Thousand Shall Fall', a highly regarded book that chronicles his RCAF training and service with Bomber Command. A student at 5 EFTS, he recalled,

"It was a surprisingly warm afternoon for the end of April 1942. Through a purely routine oversight, the Air Force had neglected to arrange for any transport, and we were a great deal warmer by the time we had marched the three miles up the gravel road to the flying field toting our kit bags.

"Outside, everywhere one looked there were Tiger Moths. I never counted them, but I guessed there were about sixty all told on the station. At any one time one would see half a dozen being refueled, half a dozen taxiing out to the take-off point in the prescribed zig-zag pattern, one taking off, one or two climbing away after take-off, and two or three spotted about the circuit at various points preparing to land. It was a scene of immense industry, noisy and wind-blown; but blended into the over-all impression were prominent elements of soaring grace and frail beauty."

Murray's guess was not far off -during his time at 5 EFTS the school had seventy-eight Tiger Moths in service. As for RCAF personnel, there were six officers, eighteen other RCAF, and 203 trainees.

It must be remembered that for most of its existence, 5 EFTS did not have runways, but operated from the same grass field the station had utilized since the Air Force's arrival in 1921.

Murray remembered the special attention that the young airmen paid to the 'EP' Ranch, "High River was in the heart of Alberta ranching country. By far the best known ranch in the area was the Duke of Windsor's, the 'EP' Ranch, so styled when he had been Edward, Prince of Wales. It was only a few minutes from High River by 'Tigerschmitt' (the name we now gave our aircraft) and held a special appeal for us. It was quite a show-place in those days, (compared with its rather tatty neighbours), with neatly painted buildings and corrals, easy to spot from the air.

"A practice had grown up whereby the fortunate cadets who had successfully completed all their flying tests would prove their prowess by low-flying over and around the Duke's ranch.

Unauthorized low-flying was strictly forbidden, and anyone caught could be washed out; but over the 'EP' Ranch the feat had a certain snob appeal that seduced most of the graduates."

Murray devotes twenty-eight pages in 'A Thousand Shall Fall' vividly describing his experiences as a student pilot at 5 EFTS. At the end of the chapter, he admits that he and his new friend, Francis Plate, "visited the Duke of Windsor's ranch and combed over the old 'EP' extensively and at low-level."



Instructor, student, and Tiger Moth with the control tower that was on the southwest corner of the hangar

The company had now been operating its own messing for a year, and the messing staff had been all-male up to this point. There had been some pretty fair battles in the kitchen, and a good deal of hiring and firing. Finally it was decided to do away with the waiters and put girls on the job. Six of them were employed as waitresses, and the airmen were overjoyed.

Early in May, tenders were called for a Recreation Hall for the station. We had always been badly handicapped by the lack of entertainment facilities. Picture shows and dances had been held in the Ground Instruction School Building where there was very little room, and finally the shows were put on in the old workshop hangar. The roof leaked when it rained and in the winter time there were actually cases of frost bite because the only heat in the building was supplied by a very ancient wood-burning furnace.

STATION DIARY: May 11, 1942

Aerodrome unserviceable on account of rain. Two flights were called out at 1330 hours to build up the dam west of High River. By 1600 hours all of High River west of the tracks was under water too deep for passenger cars. At approximately 2200 hours more personnel were called out to build up the dike gates protecting the landing field.

[Murray Peden recalled, "On May 11th we were all rushed into town as the High River began rising frighteningly - eight inches in one hour - towards the top of its banks. It felt to me that we carried a million sandbags apiece that day, but it was to no avail. By afternoon the town was flooded -in some streets the water was five feet deep. We were hauled out of our position in a horse-drawn wagon, and rode to the centre of town.

"Opposite the St. George Hotel, the driver pulled up as someone shouted to bring the Air Force in for a beer -why I don't know -the Queen Mary could have sailed through the area we had been dyking. Although the beer parlour floor was well above street level, the waiters inside were sloshing about serving beer in rubber boots at tables with water lapping half-way up their legs. No one seemed to think it odd, but if a band had struck up "Nearer My God To Thee" one could have visualized himself in



Airmen and High River residents in front of the St. George Hotel



Looking north across the flooded airfield to the 5 EFTS hangar

the third class lounge of the Titanic at the moment of the grand finale.

“Two weeks later the High River again demonstrated the aptness of its name, flooding the town for a second time to the same level. The railway tracks were awash, and there were no trains and no letters for a couple of days. Then life went on as before.”

STATION DIARY: May 12, 1942

F/Lt. W.W. Smith and F/O J. Palmer flew provisions to a stranded farmer and his wife up the river. They claimed to have made a direct hit on their first run over the target.

[Of this incident, L. Nuttall wrote, “Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Pratt, who lived on a ranch about a mile from town were cut off by the rising waters and forced to seek sanctuary on a grassy knoll. Their whereabouts were unknown until the Flying School came to the rescue by organizing a patrol of aircraft which swept the area and located the stranded couple. Immediate rescue proved impossible and the next day the School dispatched a plane with a tent, food and blankets which were, ‘dropped right into the lap of the marooned couple in a fine display of marksmanship!’ The planes kept up a search for other victims throughout the week until the falling waters made the task unnecessary.”]

STATION DIARY: May 13, 1942

Tiger Moth 5091 crashed, taking the life of Sgt. P.H. Chapman and seriously injuring LAC R.B. Thompson (student).

[Sergeant Chapman was occupying the front seat while giving instruction to his student. After a gentle turn to starboard, the aircraft went in to a spin to starboard. The pilot failed to recover and the aircraft struck the ground five miles northwest of High River. The propeller was not turning at the time of impact.]



Tiger Moth 5091 following the fatal accident

STATION DIARY: July 14, 1942

The station is taking on a very neat, colourful appearance. A very marked improvement over a year ago is noticed. Shrubs, flowers, and a good growth of grass has been well worth the effort.



5 Elementary Flying Training School -Main Entrance



Partially submerged buildings at the Dry (Frank) Lake relief field

A relief aerodrome on Dry (Frank) Lake had been built to enable students to practice approaches away from the school's busy airfield. Gordon Jones recalled flying into the relief field during the winter of 1941-1942, "We used to fly into the dry lake bottom which was flat and sandy. However heavy rains and a snow melt in 1942 ended its use."

The relief aerodrome on Dry Lake was under several feet of water all summer. To get to the shack, which had been used for an office, a boat had to be used. The main aerodrome wasn't much better early in August when a cloudburst almost drowned the station for two or three days.

[Regarding 5 EFTS's influence on the young men of High River and area who were approaching the critical age of eighteen during the war, L. Nuttall wrote, "During these years the enlistment of High River and district youth swung heavily to the RCAF and away from the army and navy. This shift was undoubtedly a reflection of the influence of the flying school and the excitement that the base and its young men, smartly attired in blue uniforms, generated. In matters of recruitment however, the RCAF left nothing to chance.

"It organized a highly successful High River Air Cadet Squadron in September 1942. The organizer, F/Lt. Dall, persuaded the local Rotary club to sponsor the cadet organization and outlined the hopes and syllabus of the

proposed squadron at one of their meetings. At this meeting, he noted that Air Cadet training would be useful in many areas of work with the RCAF and pointedly omitted mention of the other services. The newspaper reporter who attended the meeting agreed with this attitude, and stated that, 'It seems reasonable that High River boys of high school age should turn towards air cadet training as opposed to the other two services.

In December, an unexpectedly large number of thirty boys joined the new squadron and swamped its ability to equip and train them. Recruiting was delayed until the logistics problems were solved. Four months later, another seventeen lads were permitted to join. Not unnaturally, the High River High School graduates, who were also air cadets, universally volunteered for RCAF service throughout the remainder of the war."]

STATION DIARY: September 9, 1942

At 1140 hours, a report was received of an accident 2.5 miles north and 1.5 miles west of High River, Alberta. F/Lt. A.W. Vanderburg, the Station Medical Officer, proceeded with the ambulance to the scene and found the aircraft on fire with the occupants killed. The crash tender was called to put out the fire. Mr. J. Patton, assistant CFI, informed No. 4 Training Command that it was a Crane aircraft (based at 3 Service Flying Training School, Calgary). The occupants of the plane were LAC R.J. Wicklem, LAC G.S. Merrical and LAC W.A. Lucas, all graduates of this unit. The civilian staff of No. 5 EFTS deserve special mention for the assistance they gave.

STATION DIARY: September 24, 1942

Course 61 graduated this day with 41 graduates. 20 were posted to 10 SFTS in Dauphin, Manitoba and 21 were granted leave pending posting to 3 SFTS Calgary. A graduation party was given by the Company and was enjoyed by all.

[Following success at an EFTS, graduates were posted to a Service Flying Training School. When Course 61 graduated, both 10 SFTS and 3 SFTS were utilizing twin-engined Cessna Cranes, so all of these graduates would likely go on to fly bombers. Most had likely been hoping to be posted to an SFTS

that utilized single-engined Harvard advanced trainers so that they might become fighter pilots. The coveted RCAF pilot wings were not presented until graduation from an SFTS.]

STATION DIARY: September 30, 1942

A trainee of Course 65 came up for cease training, the reason being 'Fear of the Air'. This was the first case of this nature, at the beginning of a course, known at this station.

Our first draft of RAF pupils arrived at the end of September. Hitherto there had at times been one of two included in Canadian classes, but this was our first experience with a course of them.

On October 10th, one of the RAF students, LAC R.E.W. Redwood was killed in the crash of Tiger Moth 5963 six miles southeast of High River while flying solo. He was buried with full Air Force honours in the High River cemetery, his classmates forming the firing party.

[During a routine training flight, the aircraft entered a spin at roughly 2500 feet. Partial recovery was made at 1000 feet but the aircraft stalled again and went into a second spin. The aircraft made four or five turns until it struck the ground.]

[Regarding the Royal Air Force students, a December editorial in the High River Times apologized to the visitors from the UK for the lack of snow and admitted that, "The hopes for a white Christmas are slim, but in this country it can be a chinook one minute and a roaring blizzard the next."

Apparently, Anglo-Canadian differences became a serious problem in High River, for starting in 1942, most RAF trainees in southern Alberta were sent for training to 31 EFTS De Winton which was operated by the Royal Air Force.

Although some RAF personnel continued to train at High River, RCAF students remained in the majority for the balance of the war. The fact that the bulk of future trainees were Canadian was a significant factor in reducing the possibilities for friction that cropped up between town and base at some schools.]



The funeral of LAC Redwood



Royal Air Force headstones in the High River Cemetery



'The First Cornells' -A commissioned painting by John Rutherford

For months there had been rumours of the impending arrival of the Cornells, and finally in October two of them came in and were much admired. The maintenance section were not so pleased as they had absolutely no publications or information on them, nor any American tools and apparently couldn't buy them. Those first Cornells piled up a lot of hours before all the instructors had been checked and completed the required solo time.

[In the spring of 1941, the Fairchild Cornell was selected to replace the aging de Havilland Tiger Moths and Fleet Fawns and Finches to become the primary RCAF trainer used under the BCATP. A total of 1642 were built in Canada by Fleet of Fort Erie, Ontario. The prototype Fleet-built Cornell flew in July 1942.

The Cornell's fuselage consists of a fabric covered steel tube framework. Wings were manufactured in three sections with a wooden spruce spar and rib structure. The ribs were of the Warren truss type with spruce cap strips and bracing. They were covered with mahogany plywood, as were the horizontal and vertical stabilizers. All the control surfaces were fabric covered over a metal structure. The under carriage was non-retractable.



5 EFTS Cornells flying south with the Canadian Rockies beyond

On warm days at high-altitude training schools such as High River, the Cornell's performance was less than adequate with long takeoff runs being required. During 1943, a wing-structure problem required reinforcement of the centre-section main spar. However, the aircraft was generally well-liked and remained in service with the Royal Canadian Air Force until replaced by the de Havilland Chipmunk in 1948.]

STATION DIARY: November 6, 1942

Tiger Moth aircraft number 5926 instructor T/Sgt. J.W.R. Lailey and pupil pilot LAC J.R. Yakimchuk were unable to recover from a spin which started at an altitude of 5000 feet. Both bailed out and were uninjured.

The first parachute jumps during a training flight occurred in November when 'Jumping Joe' Lailey and LAC Yakimchuk bailed out southwest of the field. Thus they qualified as members of the Caterpillar Club, and in doing so gave Roy Lomheim, our Parachute Packer, quite a boost. Roy had finally proved that he didn't put blankets in the packs.

STATION DIARY: November 30, 1942

Aircraft on Station: Tiger Moth: 62, Cornell; 15.

[By the end of November, the conversion of the school from Tiger Moths to Cornells was underway.]

The Recreation Hall was finally completed, and with the heat turned on just in time for a children's Christmas party on December 20. With the subsequent addition of a Projection Booth, we were soon treated to First-Run movies.



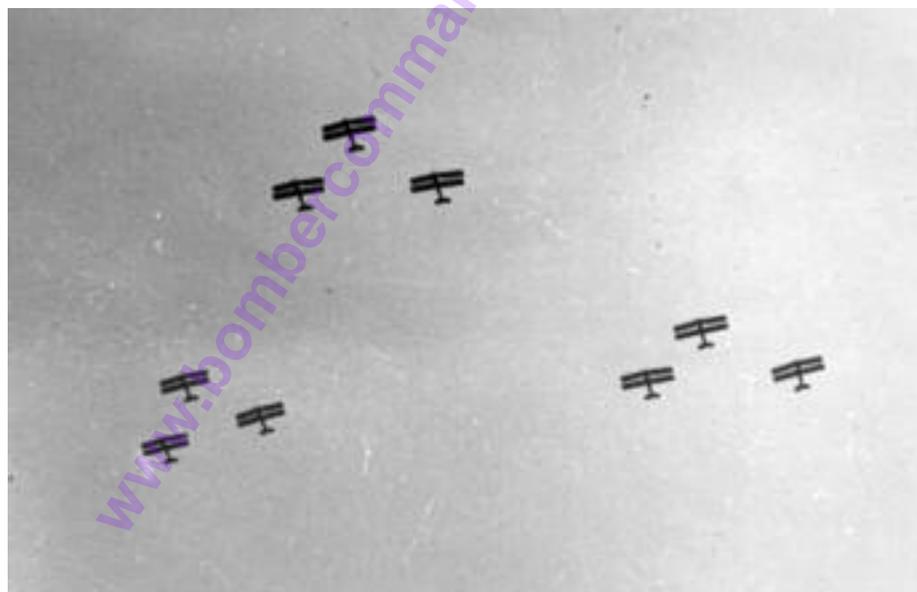
The Recreation Hall at 5 EFTS

[Following the closure of the station, the Recreation Hall was moved to downtown High River to become the town's Community Centre.]





High River as seen from a 5 EFTS Tiger Moth in 1942



Tiger Moths in formation over 5 EFTS

5 EFTS HIGH RIVER -1943

The New Year found us with more Cornells than Tigers, and half the courses were on the new aircraft. This was the month of blizzards and cold. The snow drifted into the buildings, and the outside temperature dropped to 52 degrees below. The back seat of a Cornell was relatively warm with the heater on. There the temperature was only 25 degrees below.

The weather during the balance of the winter made flying conditions very difficult. Either there was drifting snow, or worse, a chinook came along and turned the field into a sea of mud. At the end of March the spring thaws came along and both the main aerodrome and the relief field (at Frank Lake) were largely under water.

The ditches were shored up, and a large pump was used to pump the water off the main field. Unfortunately, it could flow back quite as fast as it was pumped off, so for several days there was little improvement.

STATION DIARY: February 9, 1943

S/L W.W. Smith is spending every available minute with the new squadron commanders reorganizing the squadrons and supervising the modification of the night flying flare path equipment.

STATION DIARY: March 1, 1943

Aircraft strength: Cornells 64; Tiger Moths 8

[The schools conversion to Cornells is now practically complete. By the end of March there were only two Tiger Moths on the Station, both of which were unserviceable.

The Tiger Moths had served No. 5 EFTS well -one veteran (#4080), had flown a total of 2359 training hours and carried at least two hundred different pilots. It was involved in four accidents but none of the students had been injured.]

In May, Squadron Leader Smith was awarded the Air Force Cross. Those who had known him since the days when he carried out the training of Air Force pilots at the Calgary Aero Club, were very pleased to see this recognition of the time and

energy he had devoted to the job of training pilots, at times under very difficult conditions.

[The Air Force Cross is awarded to officers for an act or acts of valour, courage, or devotion to duty performed while flying, but not during active operations against the enemy.

The citation for S/L Smith's award reads, "This officer has been engaged in Flying Instructor duties since May, 1939. During this period he has flown 1,900 hours, his hours having been limited by his employment on administrative duties as Chief Flying Instructor. The number of hours flown by Squadron Leader Smith totals 4,700.

In this time he has never been involved in any accident causing damage to aircraft or injuries to personnel. He has been responsible for the organization of the flying training at this unit since its inception in 1940. Prior to that time, he supervised the training of Provisional Pilot Officers in his capacity as Chief Flying Instructor and Manager of a civilian-operated school. This officer's efficiency and conscientious devotion to duty have been an inspiration to all officers and students under his command."

STATION DIARY: May 26, 1943

Aircraft FH819 force-landed 18 miles west of Nanton at 1015 hours. P/O R.E. Spooner (Instructor) and LAC J.B. Murray (Student) were uninjured. It was a "B" category crash due to engine failure and the fact that the pilot overshot the field, hit some stumps and turned over.

Aircraft FH870, Corporal A.T. Lindsay (student-pilot), while attempting a cross-wind landing, cartwheeled and turned over, suffering minor injuries.

The construction works on the new barracks and the second hangar proceeded very slowly, but in June one of the wings of the barrack block was completed. Work was also started on the runways, which had long been needed on the Station. The muddy condition of the field in the spring had meant the loss of much flying time. However, we built up an imposing number of hours. In August we completed our 200,000th hour of flying, which even in a Tiger Moth is equivalent to 640 trips around world at the equator.



Cornells and the first hangar at 5 EFTS

STATION DIARY: June 12, 1943

Cornell FJ7576 flown by P/O G. Sinclair and LAC G.W. Lindsay were involved in a crash three miles east of the airport at 0900 hours. Both the instructor and the student were killed.

[The aircraft stalled and crashed during a practice forced landing.]

STATION DIARY: June 30, 1943

Strength this date: Trainees 286; Aircraft strength: Cornells 89

[5 EFTS appears to be reaching its highest numbers of student-pilots and aircraft.]

STATION DIARY: July 17, 18, 19, 21, 23, 1943

Field still wet and muddy; Aircraft FH699 hit some debris on take off; The field is drying fast but is still chopped up by workmen digging ditches which are a menace; Aircraft FH835 hit a mound of dirt while taxiing, damaging the propeller beyond repair; After landing Aircraft FH863 started to ground loop. Corrective action with rudder was not sufficient to check it, so the brake was applied but the aircraft hit a bump causing it to nose up. This accident was caused by the rough condition of the field; Aircraft FH839 hit a pile of dirt from a ditch while taking off.

[The Station's diary often refers to problems utilizing their airfield including worn areas with little grass, having to re-seed areas, softness due to snowmelt or rain, and in the above, apparent construction -perhaps drainage ditches or the badly needed runways.]

STATION DIARY: August 3, 1943

A fatal accident today, one instructor, P/O E.W. Davidson, and a pupil, LAC K.A. Ing killed at 1615 hours east of Mazeppa. Believe the plane went into a spiral dive. The plane, Cornell 2865 was a total loss.

[The aircraft was witnessed at 8000 feet with the engine at full power. After diving for some distance, it appeared to level off, slow down and fly straight and level for a short period of time. It then made a shallow descending turn to starboard, making about two complete turns. The aircraft went into a tight spiral dive. The spiral got tighter as the aircraft quickly lost altitude. When it was roughly 800 to 1000 feet above ground, the port wing was ripped off. The aircraft made one or two more turns to the starboard. It then appeared to straighten out then plummet straight down to the ground one mile east of Mazzepa.]

STATION DIARY: August 30, 1943

S/L W.W. Smith AFC Commanding Officer going on leave.
F/Lt. J.E. Palmer to be C/O during his absence.

STATION DIARY: September 21, 1943

One accident or near accident. A student, Sgt. Westman of Course 89, on first solo could not make a landing at relief field until twelfth approach. Finally landed safely. Time to land: one hour and thirty minutes.

STATION DIARY: September 23, 1943

Contractors started today to put priming coat on runways.

The second anniversary of our opening in High River was held on the 25th of September. A crowd of around 2000 people turned out to see the program of sports events and to make a tour of the station. Other features included a display of flying equipment and aircraft, an air show and a parachute jump. The newly formed station band, under the direction of Jack Pickersgill, played for the entertainment of the visitors.

About 2000 People Enjoy Celebration Sponsored By High River Flying School

Beautiful day for track and field events and novelty entertainment of all kinds

Escort Visitors Through Buildings

Outstanding athletes in various classes of day activities display and parachute jump

An ideal afternoon, though a little in the hot side, contributed to the general cheer to the success of the Sports Day held at High River E.F.T.S. on Saturday. The school event was in celebration of the second anniversary of official opening of the E.F.T.S. and the program of sports and entertainment, was given by permission of D. E. Young, managing director, and Squadron Leader F. S. Henderson, A.F.C., Commanding Officer.

The general public was invited to take in the celebration, and the air was filled with the many who could add to the pleasure and interest of visitors. Despite the threat of hot weather, and the risk of burnout in some instances, with the constant attention of the medical committee, a great crowd of people from town and country attended the beautiful day, and about 2000 strong.

The track and field sports were the primary attraction of the afternoon, and arrangements in connection with these became almost automatic organization on the part of something in charge. Athletic events were of generally high standard, and a number of outstanding athletes showed up in the competitive events both on track and in the field.

The afternoon's F.S. Henderson and Walter Oakley took the spectators through with their racing comment on sports events, providing nothing in the way of comedy, metaphors or highlights in their descriptive facilities.

Varying the program of same and field events were a number of interesting contests which were ingenious and surprising. The position drills and traditional sports were an essential feature of the day, and a variety of fancy stunts going on in the field.

Sports events in the field were of particular interest, and each event.

Leading accommodation for the day provided adjoining the station, but many visitors came from the area which included the track.

The climax of the afternoon's varied entertainment was a display of acrobatics and formation flying, and a parachute jump by Ray Lambdin, all eyes were at the Tower and Anchor North were turned skyward to follow the skilled and beautiful aerial display. Flying in the formation formation were F.S. Henderson, F/O Jack Brown and F/O Leslie Jones.



5 EFTS Station Band



Ron Lomheim preparing to jump from a Cornell

STATION DIARY: September 30, 1943

Relief field in use and northeast-southwest runway now open and in use at last. This should cut down our taxiing accidents. Personnel: 243 airmen and other ranks; 5 officers
Aircraft Strength: Cornells: 88

STATION DIARY: October 14, 1943

Weather turned cold in the morning. Ground personnel found it difficult to start engines as no heat in old hangar. New hangar not completed. It was found necessary to dismantle heating unit in old hangar owing to the foundation having sunk a matter of seven inches and as our tarmac crew is 75% girls, the resultant delay in getting engines started gave us the difference of one hour in the possible flying hours carried out.

In November it was announced that we had won the coveted Minister's Efficiency Pennant for the quarter July 1st to September 30th. This award is made quarterly to the school that Air Force Headquarters judges is the most efficient of its type in Canada. In that we had been operating under difficulties for the whole of this period due to construction of runways and buildings, the award was something of a surprise to everyone. It is a coveted trophy that is hung to the flagpole for three months



G/C Flynn, D.K. Yorath, and Jock
Palmer with the Minister's
Efficiency Pennant

STATION DIARY: November 11, 1943

The commanding officer, F/Lt. J.E. Palmer AFC placed two wreaths today on the graves of LAC R.E.W. Redwood and LAC K.A. Ing, both of Great Britain, who lost their lives in the service while training at High River.

[The 'AFC' was underlined in the diary entry, likely to emphasize that on October 26, F/Lt. Palmer had been awarded the Air Force Cross.]

The citation reads: "Having been connected with flying training for the past twenty years, this officer, for the past two years, has capably fulfilled his duties as an Assistant Chief Flying Instructor and a Chief Flying Instructor. His experience and unfailing devotion to duty have inspired confidence and respect in both trainees and Instructors. Through his untiring efforts as Chief Flying Instructor all courses graduated on time with all sequences completed despite the difficulties that had to be overcome.]

STATION DIARY: November 26, 1943

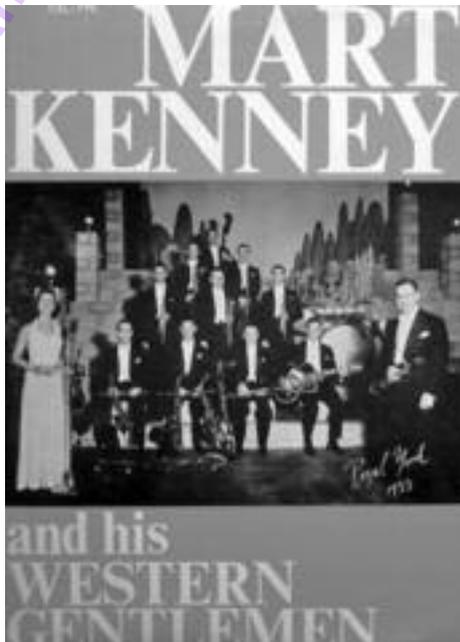
One bad accident at 1645 hours. "A" category crash 23 miles west of Nanton involving Cornell FH835 with flying instructor WO2 N.R. Price and student LAC H. Yousie. Word came of the crash at about 1930 hours while the banquet was in progress of the graduating Course #91. The commanding officer left with the ambulance. Both occupants of the plane had walked five miles for help in a very shaky condition, one with a broken nose and the other with a sprained ankle. They were taken to Nanton by a farmer who phoned in from there for the ambulance. Cause of the accident was loss of RPM's by engine on routine training flight making it impossible to hold height. Pilot carried out forced landing on hillside. A/C struck heavily and swung.

STATION DIARY: November 28, 1943

Big dance tonight with Mart Kenney's Orchestra in the Recreation Hall, at least six hundred expected to attend.

[Station dances were held regularly and 5 EFTS had its own orchestra led by Johnny Kucheron. When military music was required, the station's band, under the leadership of Jack Pickersgill, was called upon. On this occasion, the school was obviously delighted to have 'Mart Kenney and his Western Gentlemen' for their dance.

Mart Kenney and his band were referred to as, "Canada's top contribution to the field of big-name bands." The visit to High River was part of their second cross-Canada tour of the year.]



At the end of November the course was lengthened by two weeks, giving us ten weeks in which to do just about the same amount of work that had been crowded into seven when the school first started.



5 EFTS 'WD's (Royal Canadian Air Force Womens' Division)



A formation of nine 5 EFTS Cornells



1944 airphoto showing the two hangars at 5 EFTS



Cornell line-up for a ceremony

5 EFTS HIGH RIVER -1944

STATION DIARY: January 1, 1944

No flying today, New Years Day, and all is well and bright. Weather is mild. A big dance tonight in the Recreation Hall, open to all Station personnel. Officers' Mess and Sergeants' Mess keeping Open House, and New Years' Dinner in the Airmens' Mess with the Officers and their wives serving dinner to airmen and civilians alike. Turkey and all the trimmings. This was the start of a great night, where the camaraderie for which this Station has been noted reached a new high. When the dance finished, the celebrations continued in both Officers' and Sergeants' Messes, yet discipline and order were maintained, and no rowdiness resulted.

As we started the new year, the hangar boys were really busy with the modifications on the Cornells. They were still crowded into one hangar even though the new hangar was completed. It was the old story of "no heat."



Cornells squeezed into Hangar #1

STATION DIARY: January 5, 1944

The C/O, S/L W.W. Smith, returned and took over command again from F/Lt. J.E. Palmer.

STATION DIARY: January 19, 1944

A westerly gusty wind prevailed all day and only dual flying was done. A bad prairie fire started in the Hartell district about 25 miles west of the Station. Two busloads of airmen were sent out to help beat out the fire and the crash truck was also sent. The fire was brought under control about 1930 hours and the airmen were brought back to the Station and given a bang-up dinner and a bottle of beer. They were a tired, dirty lot of airmen when they came in but had done a good job.

STATION DIARY: January 24, 1944

We have our fingers crossed -so far no accidents this month, not even a small one and another extraordinary thing has happened. We have a "wonder course" (Course #97), the first we ever have had that has soloed 100% and all passed their 20 hour check. If they should all pass ground and flying the manager has promised the biggest celebration that has ever happened anywhere.

STATION DIARY: January 31, 1944

The end of the month and no accidents. Less students per instructor, new runways and ten weeks to finish a course may all have contributed to this factor and if Course #97 finishes 100% it will tend to prove this supposition.

[In March, all forty students that began Course #97 graduated. 5 EFTS was very proud of this, claiming that it had never been duplicated before or since in Canada.]



Dear Sir,

M.A. Shorro. W.O.1

R.A.F.  R.C.A.F.

Hi Khan & Awarat Hassan.

Norma Makruba

COURSE 97

Request the company of *LAC SINCLAIR E.J.*

M.A. Shorro at their

Graduation Banquet
(GENTLEMEN ONLY)
S.E. Thompson.

Friday, March 10th, at 7:30 p.m.

and Dance at 9:30 p.m.

By kind permission of *D. K. Yorath, Esq., and S/L W. W. Smith, A.F.C.*

A. Island *S. Harank #10* *H. Doida*

To the Instructors and Staff of No. 5 E.F.T.S. for their unfailing efforts throughout the course we express our sincere thanks and appreciation.

W. W. Smith *B. W. W. Smith*  *S.E. Thompson.*

Course 97 Graduation Banquet Invitation

STATION DIARY: March 8, 1944

Our first Court Martial on this Station is to be held today. It is a 'low-flying' offence against LAC H.E. McLachlan. All members arrived this morning. The accused pleaded guilty and the proceedings of the court were adjourned at 1500 hours.

In February and March rumors began to circulate of the imminent closing of the school. The official announcement regarding the closing down of schools appeared on March 13th, and we found that this was to be the only EFTS operating in the Command. We could no longer be second best. Our school would be the best EFTS in the Command.

[The 'Command' referred to was No. 4 Training Command which was headquartered in Calgary from October 1941 until the end of the war. It was in charge of the BCATP Stations located in most of Saskatchewan, all of Alberta, and British Columbia.]

STATION DIARY: March 27, 1944

Flying washed out at 1145 hours for Muster Parade when C/O promulgated findings of the Court Martial of LAC H.E. McLachlan. He was awarded 90 days detention by the court and this was mitigated to 59 days by the A.O.C. of No. 4 Training Command, and remustered to Standard General Duties as of the 8th day of March.

This promulgation in front of the whole School was impressive and will have its effect on all personnel on the Station.

[Unauthorized low-flying by students was clearly against regulations but it was a temptation difficult to resist by the young airmen. Clearly, LAC McLachlan was being made an example of as he was disciplined and humiliated in front of all the men and women on the Station.]

STATION DIARY: March 31, 1944

F/Lt. J.E. Palmer takes over command today while S/L W.W. Smith goes on leave overseas.



Ten 5 EFTS Cornells in formation

STATION DIARY: April 3, 1944

A fatal accident today, our first since the beginning of August last year. The pilot killed was P/O J.O. Christie on a routine solo flight. It is thought he stalled on a gliding turn and spun in. The accident occurred three quarter miles south of Azure on the railroad track. An "A" category crash at 1715 hours, aircraft Cornell #13880. An unfortunate incident to a man who won the DFC on operations overseas to come back and be killed while learning to fly.

[P/O Christie DFC had completed a tour of combat operations with 50 Squadron as a navigator. His DFC citation reads, "Pilot Officer Christie has taken part in many operational sorties against most of the enemy's heavily defended German targets. His aircraft has been severely damaged on several occasions but this has not diminished his enthusiasm for operational flying. At all times this officer's technical ability and devotion to duty have been outstanding.]

STATION DIARY: April 19, 1944

Efforts are being made to construct new hazards for The Commando Course and helping construct an old hangar into a stable for ten horses. We expect soon to secure these horses. Grounds are looking good and spring is just around the corner.

[Clearly, things are beginning to wind down at 5 EFTS. The term 'Useful Employment Group' begins to appear regularly in the Station Diary, referring to airmen who are on the Station but are awaiting their turn to be given flying instruction.]

STATION DIARY: April 28, 1944

Tonight was the big Minstrel Show and the hall was packed. The show was excellent for our own effort and costumes, scenery, orchestra, and effects, were very good. The whole show reflected creditably on the Station and for a first performance ran smoothly.

In May there were three further awards of the Air Force Cross. Flight Lieutenant Palmer attended an investiture at Calgary where he was presented with the AFC by the Earl of Athlone for valuable services as a flying instructor. Similar awards were received by Flight Lieutenant Joe Patton and Pilot Officer Wayne Duncan.

The Sixth Victory Loan campaign got off to a flying start on the first of May with the usual rally of all Station personnel. This one was particularly successful, and as usual, A.L. Smith, KC, of Calgary delivered a fine address. The quota set this time was \$54,000, the highest ever set for the school. This amount was subscribed in the first day, and by the time the campaign was over, a total of just under \$100,000 had been reached.

[Victory Loans were Canadian government appeals for money to finance the war effort during WW I and WW II. During World War II, there were nine Victory Loans that raised almost \$12 billion, about 52% from corporations and the rest from individuals.]



STATION DIARY: May 16, 1944

Night flying had to be washed out because of a down-draft over High River Town that nearly brought disaster to planes taking off for night flying. This down-draft preceded a storm front that did not quite reach the Station and the trainees had so much difficulty after taking off and gaining altitude that in some instances near collisions with house tops were narrowly avoided only by turning away at great risk as planes were being forced towards the ground with the terrific down-draft which seemed to be directly over the town of High River for a width of 1000 yards.

[Regarding the presence of the School and its aircraft and their effect on the town, L. Nuttall wrote,

“Another factor that helped shift the psychology of the town into one of total identification with the EFTS and the air war derives from the unusual nature of air training and its effect upon a community. Unlike army and navy training which takes place largely out of sight and therefore out of mind of nearby civilian centres, pilot training is by its nature intrusive, pervasive and not infrequently dangerous to the local population.

5 EFTS was located only three miles from the heart of High River. Flying training, both dual and solo, was carried out day and night, week in and week out for forty-three months. The townsfolk adapted to, but could never quite ignore the constant drone of the Tiger Moths and Cornells. Night and day they listened to the changing sound of throttles, desperately opening and closing as novice pilots bumbled their way around the ‘circuits and bumps’.

They never quite adjusted to the heart-stopping sound of an aircraft lost in cloud, or the coughing of one with engine trouble. Overhead, there were the perpetual cross-country navigation exercises, the aerobatics, the low-flying and, inevitably, the ‘beating up’ of local farms especially if one of the occupants was young and female.”]

STATION DIARY: May 27, 1944

Dual and solo all day washed out early as only one flight flying and opening of Officers Mess tonight. Mess opened with a bang. The AOC A/V/M Howsam from No. 4 TC, G/C Fraser from No. 19 SFTS (Vulcan), and many other notables from No. 4 TC came down. The mess was decorated with a great profusion of flowers of every kind. Everybody enjoyed themselves amid surroundings that gave off an atmosphere of gaiety and enjoyed a supper that was fit for a king.

The complimentary remarks on the interior decorations and the general appearance of No. 5 EFTS's new Officers Mess, from the monumental massive fireplace to the exclusive setting of the ladies powder room, was such that even a dutchess would have turned green with envy at the Jacobian panelled ceilings and soft tones of clear varnished pine covering the walls of the main lounge with its furnishings of



The fireplace in 5 EFTS's new Officers' Mess

deep leather lounge, easy chairs and chesterfields, long coloured drapes and then the ante room and bar.

This seemed to give off a restful, cool feeling to a hot afternoon in the darkened windows and cream coloured furniture artificially lighted. At one end is the bar and its contents to add a fillip to a long hard day's work. Yes, we are proud of our mess at this Station, it is worth visiting.

STATION DIARY: June 6, 1944

An historic occasion -the invasion of France commenced today at dawn (English time). Flying washed out today at 1030 hours for the morning period. A general muster of all Station personnel was held at 1100 hours for Prayer Services for the success of this great venture.

STATION DIARY: June 12, 1944

Mart Kenney broadcasted from 1745 hours to 1900 hours, also played for a Station dance in the evening. Attendance was large and enthusiastic.

[During WW II, The Coca Cola Company sponsored the 'Victory Parade of Canada's Spotlight Band'. During 1943 and 1944, 'Mart Kenney and his Western Gentlemen' broadcasted over the CBC from two hundred locations -virtually every army, navy and air force base in Canada as well as industrial facilities, entertaining 400,000 war workers and the men and women in Canada's armed services.]

STATION DIARY: June 21, 1944

A call for students to remuster as air-gunners or flight engineers has come in. So far the results for those taking a pilot course has been limited and the rush expected has not materialized although the inducement is for an early posting overseas if remustering as an air-gunner.

[Clearly this attempt to decrease the number of student pilots was an indication that the BCATP was graduating more pilots than the RCAF required.]

STATION DIARY: June 22, 1944

Our Harvard arrived today, aircraft FS862. This is for the instructors' use and is a welcome diversion.

On July 14, it was announced that F/Lt. Palmer, who had been C/O of the Station during the time when S/L Smith was at E.C.F.S., was being retired to the 'Reserve of Officers' and would be leaving the Service to take a position with this School in a civilian capacity. 'Jock' had been with the school since its first days at Lethbridge and was well known and liked by all the staff and by hundreds of students who passed through his hands.

STATION DIARY: July 18, 1944

The building of a new swimming hole in the river is nearly completed. This will be used by both town and service personnel. It has dressing rooms for both male and female, diving boards, raft, and roped off portions for non-swimmers. The grading of banks and clearing brush etc. is being done by 'Useful Employment' boys. It is located just above the bridge in the town of High River, and is about 2 1/2 miles from the Station, on the Highwood River.

STATION DIARY: August 11, 1944

The O.C.'s Parade was held at 1245 hours. There was considerable improvement shown in both dress and marching, probably due to our new Aircrew Leadership training, and to a large extent, the efforts of our new Commanding Officer, S/L G.E. Kerley.

STATION DIARY: August 25, 1944

S/L Kerley gave a message to the personnel, "On September 4th this Station is holding its Annual Field and Track Day. Combined with this it is our intention to inaugurate many attractions such as a Station Dance at night, mid-way games, fine movie shows, air show, and parachute jump, in fact a completed day starting in the morning with a fastball tournament. The prime motive behind this extra effort is the building up of the Station Recreational Fund."

STATION DIARY: August 30, 1944

S/L Smith returned from his course at the Empire Central Flying School in England and has resumed his post as C.F.I. and C/O of RCAF personnel. S/L Kerley, who assumed this post after the retirement of F/Lt. Palmer at the end of July, has been posted to 19 SFTS , Vulcan.

S/L Smith returned just in time for the next big event on September 4th -the carnival and sport's day in celebration of our third anniversary of operation at High River. It was the biggest thing of its kind ever held on the Station, and it required a lot of preliminary organization.

4000 people turned out for a full day of entertainment. A thousand people attended the movies in the evening, and fifteen hundred danced in the new hangar until one in the morning. Undoubtedly, it was the most successful enterprise ever put on at the school in four years of operation.



Nine Cornell Flypast at the Third Anniversary Celebration



5 Elementary Flying Training School during the summer of 1944

STATION DIARY: September 15, 1944

F/Lt. J.E. Palmer is to be retired to the Reserve. This, we all here regret as he has been a member of 5 EFTS as a civilian instructor and then as an instructor in the RCAF, thence to CFI and acting C/O for eight months during the absence of S/L W.W. Smith.

STATION DIARY: September 17, 1944

Show tonight after the ball game. A sudden-death game with No. 2 B&G Mossbank, Saskatchewan to decide on the winner of No. 4 Training Command Fastball League and No. 5 EFTS were the winners by a score of 2 to 0. This ended a series in which, in 7 games, only 5 runs were scored against our team and 22 were scored by us. The team consisted of practically all staff except for 3 trainees.

[During the summer of 1944, the entries in the Station Diary seem to be more about sports and recreation than the operation of a flying school with few comments suggesting that there was still a 'war on'. This was likely because things were slowing down at the Station and that it was operating very efficiently.]

All through October, the number of airmen on the Station was steadily decreasing, and there were rumors of closing the Station in the very near future. Despite this, all efforts were made to put the Station in top-notch shape for the inspection by

A/V/M Howsam, the C/O of No. 4 Training Command, on October 20th. Without a doubt, the Station never looked better, it was a credit to everyone who had worked at cleaning up the grounds and buildings.

Despite the success of the inspection, the day turned out to be a sad one. A meeting of all Station personnel was called in the Recreation Hall at four o'clock, and Mr. Yorath read a letter from the Minister of National Defence for Air, announcing the closing of the School. Perhaps the news was not unexpected, but coming as it did, after a very successful inspection, it was a shock.

STATION DIARY: October 31, 1944

LAC L.C. Williams of Course #110A is the only student training and the balance of the flying was done by instructors of refresher courses.

[Sadly the town prepared for the end. On November 6, a simple headline in The High River Times read "No. 5 EFTS is Now Closed Down." The article commented on the speed with which the closure had occurred and expressed a hope that the skilled tradesmen, formerly employed by the base, might become permanent 'High Riverites'. Admitting that life in High River "will be very flat for a time," the article went on to say,

"These young people who entered our lives by Virtue of the establishment of No. 5 EFTS brought new life and happiness to the town. They were happy and responsive young people who were more than willing to meet the 'old settlers' half-way. We will miss the baby carriages, and all the healthy babies who first saw the light of day in High River, Alberta. Through the school staff, the students, the young wives and the children, High River has a link with a great multitude whom we might never had known were it not for the war. We wish them 'Happy Landings' and hope many of them will return as so many have promised to do."]

STATION DIARY: November 10, 1944

All instructional and practice flying is discontinued effective this day. Only incidental ferry trips will be made and they will not be recorded in this diary.

STATION DIARY: November 15

Effective this date, No. 5 EFTS is disbanded and the establishment has been withdrawn. The flying instructors have been posted to Claresholm, Vulcan, Pearce, Calgary, North Battleford, and Sheppard.

Except for a few hours to be spent in testing aircraft before they left the Station, our records show the total number of hours flown since the schools inception to be 254,603.5 hours and 30 minutes. 106 classes were graduated.



5 EFTS Class 94 'D' Flight -part of one of the 106 classes that graduated from 5 Elementary Flying Training School

In the final march-past, the salute was taken by Air Vice Marshal G.R. Howsam, who had been stationed at the same site in the 1920's with the High River Air Station.

In a farewell message to the personnel of 5 EFTS, AVM Howsam wrote, "In all our schools, not only airmen and airwomen, but civilian staff, have made a full contribution. It is difficult indeed to say enough in thanks to these splendid Canadians on the home front.

"Now as the war enters a new phase, my sincere greetings go to the Manager, the Chief Flying Instructor, the officers and all the men and women, service and civilian, at No. 5

Elementary Flying Training School, who have done so much in this war.

“May the future deal with you kindly. You, in a large way, have dealt most kindly with the thousands of Empire airmen who have passed through your Station. The very best of luck to each and everyone of you.

[At the closing of the EFTS, a tribute was paid to the citizens of High River by the base commander, D. K. Yorath,

“It is difficult to find words adequate to express our thanks for the manner in which you have made us feel at home. The hospitality you have extended to the staff and the thousands of young men who have passed through the school cannot possibly be repaid. You have the knowledge, however, that there are thousands of people scattered all over the world who, for the rest of their lives, will have very fond memories of the town and of the people here who make this one of the most pleasant places in western Canada in which to live.”

The RCAF personnel have almost all been posted, and in a few days the majority of the civilian staff will have left, leaving only a few die-hards to complete the checking and packing of equipment. Then they too will leave, and No. 5 EFTS will be just a collection of buildings, lacking the personality and the life that has been given them by the people who were once their occupants.

[On Saturday February 3 1945, a mammoth auction sale was held in the No. 1 Hangar of all the remaining, unsold company supplies and equipment. Between four and five thousand people attended the sale from all over southern Alberta. The first sale was made at 10:30 am and the last at 11:55 pm.

There were few permanent effects of the BCATP in High River. The base closed, and despite some local attempts to reopen it as a municipal airport, remained closed. The town had little choice but to adapt to the change. Its brief, twenty-three year involvement with Canada's Air Force ended as abruptly as it had begun.]



Front cover of the booklet prepared by Carl Jones as 5 EFTS was closing

GORDON JONES AND TIGER MOTH 1214

Posted to 5 EFTS during August 1941, Gordon Jones learned to fly in Tiger Moths, including ten flights in 1214. After completing his training at 7 SFTS in Fort Macleod, Gordon became a flight instructor. He was then posted back to 5 EFTS, where he instructed rookie pilots on the Tiger Moth and later on Cornells.

Following the war, Gordon farmed near High River and continued flying, both recreationally and as a flight instructor.

After renting 1214 to be featured as part of a 5 EFTS Reunion in 1992, Gordon purchased the aircraft in 1994. He kept it in his private hangar at High River, flying 1214 regularly until he was ninety years old. Gordon was a regular volunteer at the Bomber Command Museum of Canada and always happy to perform flypasts during museum special events.

Tiger Moth 1214 was built in Canada and delivered to the RCAF on 12 February 1942. It was flown to 5 EFTS in High River where it served until the Cornell's arrived. Following the war, its ownership and the aircraft's history are not clear. It was operated by the Edmonton Flying Club for a period of time and then, in the early 1970's, stored in a dairy barn in the Edmonton area until it was restored to flying condition in 1984.

Gordon Jones made arrangements for his aircraft to be donated to the Bomber Command Museum of Canada following his death. Tiger Moth 1214 is maintained by the museum in 'taxiable' condition.



**Gordon Jones -Fight Instructor
at 5 EFTS High River**



**Gordon Jones and his Tiger Moth 1214 at the
2011 Bomber Command Museum of Canada Fly-In**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As mentioned in the 'Notes to Readers', this book is largely the writing of Bruce Gowans and Carl Jones. It is hoped that their work will now be enjoyed by a wider audience.

I appreciate being able to make use of information from the archives assembled by Chris Charland and Hugh Halliday.

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Dan Smith of the University of Victoria made his extensive research and photos related to the aerial photography conducted from the High River Air Station available and this is much appreciated.

Marian Jones, who was married to Carl and spent the war years at High River, provided photos, other documents, and her recollections of life at 5 EFTS. Thanks very much Marion.

Gordon Jones donated copies of his photo collection to the museum and many of them have been included.

Thanks to Irene Kerr and the Museum of the Highwood for sharing their related photo files and other information.

Also included are photos from the archives of the Bomber Command Museum of Canada. Several of these are from the Norm McRae collection.

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Bill Smith (left) with Carl Jones

