



**SUPPLY
LINE**

War in the Air

Canada's air force became the world's fourth-largest by 1945. More than 250,000 Canadian men and women joined the Royal Canadian Air Force. Around 2,000 more served with Britain's Royal Air Force. Canadians took part in almost every aspect of the air war, at home and around the world.

The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan

More than 131,500 personnel were trained in Canada under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. They came from countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia and

New Zealand. Bombers, gunners, navigators, wireless operators and pilots received training. They served with the Canadian, British and other **Allied** air forces.

The Royal Canadian Air Force Women's Division

The air force was the first to establish a women's branch, in 1941. It was renamed the Royal Canadian Air Force Women's Division in February 1942. More than 17,000 women joined.

They served in Canada, the United Kingdom and elsewhere in non-combatant roles ranging from clerical work to aircraft maintenance.

The Royal Canadian Air Force on Many Fronts

Transport aircraft carried equipment, troops and supplies. Canadian **squadrons** protected ocean **convoys**. Some searched for enemy submarines, and others attacked enemy ships

with gunfire, bombs, torpedoes and rockets. Aircrews sometimes faced heavy anti-aircraft fire and enemy planes.

Canadians also flew fighter aircraft. They defended Britain from enemy airplanes and carried out operations over German-occupied Europe and other areas. They escorted

bombers and attacked enemy aircraft and airfields, day and night. Fighters also supported Allied troops on the battlefield, doing reconnaissance and attacking enemy forces.

Bomber Command

The Royal Canadian Air Force took part in the massive and costly strategic air offensive against Germany. Germany began the war with air offensives. During the Battle of Britain, it targeted British aircraft and bases, then attacked urban centres and civilians. The Allies responded in kind, and with growing strength and impact.

Many Canadians, in both Canadian and British units, served in Bomber Command. Part of Britain's Royal Air Force, it was responsible for attacking targets in Germany, Italy and German-occupied Europe. The effectiveness of strategic bombing continues to be debated, but it had wide wartime public and political support as part of the Allied war effort.

The Allied bombing campaign became more effective as time went on. Late in the war, it caused German production of weapons, equipment and fuel to fall substantially. Germany had to divert many resources into repairing bomb damage and building anti-bomber defences, including fighter aircraft and guns.

The Allied bombing campaign destroyed parts of every major German city. It also damaged or destroyed many industries, as well as transportation links such as railways. Some 600,000 people were killed during the campaign, and more than five million were left homeless.

Aftermath

By the end of the Second World War, more than 17,000 members of the Royal Canadian Air Force had been killed.

Nearly 10,000 of them died during the bomber offensive. About 4,000 were wounded, injured or taken prisoner.

Vocabulary

Squadron (air force):

An air force unit made up of a group of aircraft, their aircrews, and the supporting groundcrew and administrative elements.

Convoy:

A group of ships or motor vehicles that travel together to support and protect each other. Convoys often have armed escorts to help provide protection.

Allies:

The countries, including Canada, that joined together in opposing the Axis powers during the Second World War. The largest Allied nations were the United Kingdom, the United States, the Soviet Union and China.

Timeline

DECEMBER 1939

The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan agreement is signed.

JANUARY 1940

Establishment of Royal Canadian Air Force Overseas Headquarters in London, England.

JULY 1941

Creation of Canadian Women's Auxiliary Air Force. Becomes Royal Canadian Air Force Women's Division in February 1942.

DECEMBER 1941

Japan enters the war.

OCTOBER 1942

6 Group is created, bringing together almost all Canadian squadrons in Bomber Command.

LATE 1944

Royal Canadian Air Force peak strength is at more than 215,000 in uniform, including members of the Women's Division.

31 MARCH 1945

End of British Commonwealth Air Training Plan.

MAY 1945

Germany surrenders.

AUGUST 1945

Japan capitulates.