



Wings for Victory: The Remarkable Story of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in Canada

Spencer Dunmore

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The proportions of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan were huge. At its peak, the plan was graduating over 3,000 aircrew a month from 107 training schools across Canada. In total, graduates numbered more than 130,000. This enormous war effort made Canada WWII's "aerodrome of democracy."

Full of personal anecdotes, *Wings For Victory* is the story of the BCATP and of the politicians who negotiated it into existence, of the officers and airmen of the RCAF and the RAF, and of the many civilians who made it work day by day. Above all, it is the story of the young men who entered the scheme as clerks and farmers, students and salesmen, and graduated as pilots, navigators, air gunners, air bombers, and flight engineers.

In the late 1930s, mindful of the need to play an important role in the looming war, Canadian politicians conceived of a plan that would entail a major commitment to the war effort yet keep the country's young men at home and avoid the horrendous loss of Canadian lives experienced on the ground in WWI. The British Commonwealth Air training Plan was born, whereby young recruits from Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand would join their Canadian counterparts in training schools to be set up across the country. Here they would be trained to fight the battles of the new war, in the air. Canada was the ideal location, far enough away from the threat of air raids, and with plenty of wide open space for the business of building airfields and teaching men to fly.

In a huge, country-wide mobilization of personnel and resources, training facilities were hastily erected from Vancouver to Charlottetown. And when young recruits from around the globe started pouring into the scores of towns and villages across the map selected as sites for the BCATP, communities were turned upside down.

Spencer Dunmore follows these raw young recruits through the lengthy selection process and training regimen that awaited them so far from home. Many wouldn't make it. A large number "washed out," finding themselves no longer considered pilot material. The training process would injure some and kill some more. A handful would discover that, although they had always dreamed of flying, they loathed and feared the reality of it.

But masses of them were eventually successful and were shipped to Europe, where they put their Canadian training to the ultimate test, winning the war in the air.

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