

THECASTING

In 1989 the Canadian Forces Weather Service celebrated 50 years of service to all branches of the Canadian military, at home and around the world. Official operations began just prior to World War II, but as this excerpt from a booklet called "The History of the CFWS" by W. G. Richardson shows, daily forecasts were provided to the Royal Flying Corps at Camp Borden, Ontario, as early as 1917.

Meteorology in the Canadian military predates World War II in the form of a small number of personnel in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) Met Observer Trade. Weather information, however, was provided to the military prior to this. As early as 1917, daily forecasts were provided to the Royal Flying Corps at Camp Borden for flight training. In the early 1920's, pilot balloon observations were done as a meteorological service for operational flying at several Air Force stations. The Department of National Defence was responsible for all civil as well as military aviation prior to 1936. For this

On 3 September 1939, Britain declared war on Germany and a week later Canada followed suit. A decade of discussions, experiments and suggestions between various departments of the Canadian government now had to become a real plan of operation. As meteorological information and weather forecasts were the responsibility of the Department of Transport, and the Department of National Defence had to acquire information and personnel from that source.

On 4 September 1939, a request was made for a forecast office at Halifax to serve the Eastern Air Command. At the same time, the British High Commissioner also requested Canada to provide weather services on the east coast to the Royal Navy. The Halifax office opened for operations on 11 September 1939 with a staff of eleven persons.

Also during September, the Trenton RCAF station established a meteorological training school. The course lasted six months with the students having to be high school graduates. These graduates were then sent to coastal operation stations to observe and to interpret



The RCAF Lancaster bomber, now on display near the Canadian National Exhibition grounds, flew Canadian aircrews on bombing missions over Germany in the Second World War and relied on meteorological data provided by the Canadian Forces Weather Service.

reason, it is difficult to ascertain if forecasts requested were for military or civilian use. The Department of National Defence did establish an aviation forecast office at St. Hubert, but it was cancelled after the crash of an R. 101 airship.

Prior to 1939, there was no organized meteorological service for the RCAF. The RCAF request, on 1 December 1938, for specific units to have meteorologists was not approved until 1 April 1939. It was not until that summer that the first meteorologist (forecaster) along with a meteorological assistant (observer) were sent to the RCAF station at Vancouver.

forecasts for air crew until meteorologists or meteorological assistants could be trained.

The Department of National Defence was in need of meteorological personnel at many of its stations across Canada. The demand for trained meteorologists and meteorological observers was even further strained with the signing of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in December of 1939. During the late months of 1939, Canada and Britain had worked out an agreement whereby the RAF aircrews would be trained at bases in Canada.

From the Department of National Defence
Newsletter Update