

Ninth Annual CAHS Toronto Chapter Dinner Meeting, May 7

Topic: 85th Anniversary of 10/110/400 Squadron

Speaker: LCol Jillian Bishop CD, Commanding Officer,
400 Tactical Helicopter Squadron, Canadian Armed Forces

Reporter: Gord McNulty



Speaker LCol Jillian Bishop CD,
Commanding Officer, 400
Tactical Helicopter Squadron,
Canadian Armed Forces

The Toronto Chapter's Annual Dinner Meeting is always an enjoyable and special occasion. Our Ninth Annual Meeting at the Canadian Forces College Armour Heights Officers' Mess continued our tradition of excellence. Thirty-five guests attended. After informal socializing, Chapter Treasurer Brigadier-General Paul Hayes, OMM, CD (Ret'd) welcomed all and expressed thanks to Major-General Fraser Holman, CD, (Ret'd), Honorary Colonel of the CFC. Paul introduced the Head Table --- his wife, Wendy Austin; the guest speaker, LCol Jillian Bishop; former Chapter President Howard Malone and his wife, Pat; and Chapter President Sheldon Benner. Grace was said by Chapter Member Tom Nettleton. Everyone enjoyed a very good dinner of roast beef, chicken or vegetarian lasagna prepared by the College and Mess staff. Sheldon introduced the Chapter Executive to a round of applause. It was a pleasure for Paul, who spent nine years as the Honorary Colonel of 400 Squadron, to introduce our distinguished guest speaker.

LCol Bishop enrolled as an aerospace engineer in the Canadian Armed Forces in 1986. She obtained a Bachelor of Engineering (Mechanical) from Royal Military College in Kingston, ON. LCol Bishop has served her entire career in support of the tactical aviation community working with the Kiowa, Twin Huey and Griffon helicopters. She has served at 403 Helicopter Operational Training Squadron, 2 Tactical Aviation Support Squadron, the Land Aviation Test and Evaluation Flight (at 403 Squadron), the Directorate of Aerospace and Engineering Program Management (Transport and Helicopters), 408 Tactical Helicopter Squadron, 1 Wing Headquarters and 400 Tactical Helicopter Squadron. During her second posting at 403 Squadron she transferred from the regular force to the reserve force.

LCol Bishop's operational experience includes a Technical Assistance Visit to Kandahar, Afghanistan in 2008 followed by a tour in Kandahar as the Air Wing A4 Maintenance from March to November 2009. Currently the Commanding Officer of 400 Tactical Squadron, she is married to Colonel Timothy Bishop, an artillery officer currently commanding the Canadian Armed Forces Joint Counter Explosive Threat Task Force.

Speaking about her "favourite topic, 400 Squadron," LCol Bishop noted the squadron will turn 85 on 5 October this year. It has the proud title of being the oldest and longest-serving squadron in the RCAF. The story originated in the early 1920s when the RCAF was formed. Since then, and through the Great Depression, cutbacks in the permanent force enabled creation of a non-permanent active air force component.

Formation & Pre-WWII

In October, 1932, authority was granted to form three non-permanent units: No. 10 in Toronto, No. 11 in Vancouver and No. 12 in Winnipeg. 10 Squadron was formed with a headquarters and three flights. The establishment included a squadron leader and six flight lieutenants, 13 flying officers and pilot officers, and 159 airmen, as well as a medical detachment and some permanent positions.

LCol Bishop said it's interesting to compare those early numbers to today's air force, which is very similar in actual strength. S/L G.S. O'Brian was appointed the first Commanding Officer, mandated to secure and furnish temporary quarters at 87 Richmond Street East in Toronto. He set up supply and communication lines with higher headquarters and interviewed prospective Squadron members.

The family of F/L Frank Trethewey owned de Lesseps Field at the intersection of what is now Jane St. and Trethewey Dr. in the Mount Dennis area. It was estimated this airfield would take 10 days of work to be suitable for operations. The property was leased and the Squadron moved there starting in August 1933. Hangars and office accommodations were prepared and painted by squadron members. Four Gipsy Moth aircraft arrived in October 1934, with tools and spare parts. The engines were in very poor condition, but the first air operation began in late October. It consisted of close reconnaissance and message dropping in support of a tactical exercise conducted by the Toronto Regiment and Mississauga Horse. The squadron borrowed two civilian aircraft for the exercise. That raised the eyebrows at higher headquarters, until it was learned the aircraft belonged to squadron members.

In the summer of 1934, Toronto City Council adopted No. 10 Squadron and granted it permission to use the title City of Toronto. In April 1935, with approval of the Chief of the General Staff, the squadron was officially designated as 10 City of Toronto Army Co-Operation Squadron. It became the first RCAF squadron honored with a city affiliation. Along with operational, training and technical duties came the inevitable ceremonial parades, such as the Toronto Garrison Church Parade, the King's Jubilee Celebration at the Ontario Legislature and Warrior's Day at the CNE.

The squadron next received the first of three Kinner-powered Fleet Fawns. Aircraft provided training during summer deployment at Camp Borden. In October, 1935, S/L Wilf Curtis assumed command of the squadron. Today, his grandson, Patrick, is Honorary Colonel of the squadron. The squadron, continuing to represent the RCAF operationally and ceremonially, sent a contingent to England in 1937 for the coronation ceremonies for King George VI. At home, it participated in coronation events in Toronto, including a flypast salute. The squadron received an Avro 621 Tutor and moved to a new facility, previously owned by the York Badminton Club.

When the non-permanent squadrons were formed, it was anticipated there would never be more than nine permanent squadrons. Therefore, the designation numbers for non-permanent squadrons started at 10. However, by late 1937, plans began to increase permanent squadrons beyond 10. Renumbering of non-permanent squadrons was required. As a result, 10 Squadron was named 110 Squadron.



110 Squadron Banner.
Photo Courtesy - Carl Mills

In 1938, an Avro 626 Tutor arrived. Ground school training included artillery co-operation, air reconnaissance, map reading, armament and Morse code. With the deteriorating situation in Europe, training took a subtle change in direction and intensity. Training included parachute inspection and packing, army co-operation methods, photo, signals equipment and message pickup and dropping. A Tiger Moth arrived in May, 1938, bringing the squadron inventory to four different types of aircraft. That number was reduced to three when, shortly after, the Gipsy Moth was struck off unit strength. Another Tutor was added. At this time, the squadron suffered its first aircraft accident --- the crash of a Tiger Moth. The pilot was seriously injured.

WWII

In November 1938, on the ceremonial side, 110 Squadron Pipes and Drums debuted during a church parade. This was the first pipe band in the RCAF. The Pipes and Drums remain part of 400 Squadron today. On 3 September, 1939, the unit was called on active service when Prime Minister Mackenzie King recommended to Parliament that Canada declare war on Germany. A total of 110 airmen volunteered for active service. On 10 September, 1939, Canada declared war on Germany. A parade was held the next day

when all personnel were advised of the mobilization order. 110 Squadron members were sworn in and the squadron war diary was officially opened.

Some squadron aircraft were sent elsewhere in Canada to support training at various flying clubs. Squadron pilots kept busy working with the Royal Canadian Artillery. They observed shots from the guns at Camp Borden and flew battery commanders over the batteries to help them appreciate the problems of concealment. For a few months, there had been a rumour about a new, modern aircraft for the squadron. Accordingly, in 1939, the Lysander arrived. The upgrade had not been officially announced, but became inevitable when a Squadron Leader arrived at de Lesseps Field to provide familiarization flights and lectures on performance and maintenance. Late in November, 1939, W/C Curtis arrived at de Lesseps Field. No one knew that Curtis' visit with the Squadron Leader would place 110 Squadron in the vanguard of Canada's participation in the Second World War. However, the Chief of the Air Staff, in a letter to the Minister of National Defence, had expressed concern over the prospect of the RCAF being limited to running training schools and home defence. If a couple of overseas squadrons were formed, Canadian airmen would be assigned to the RAF, as in the First World War. As the letter rightly stated, if Canadian airmen could serve in Canadian squadrons, they would bring credit to Canada and the nation, and build up traditions for the RCAF and their squadrons.



Lysanders of 400 Squadron at Odiham, UK C. 1941
Photo Courtesy - 400 Squadron Historical Society

In December, 1939, Canada announced the dispatch of No. 110 Army Co-Operation Squadron to Europe. Intensive training was planned, but events unfolded so quickly that the plan was never really implemented. The squadron was ordered to move to Ottawa. Other permanent and non-permanent personnel were posted to 110 Squadron. Soon, after Christmas, Lysanders were delivered to the Squadron. In 1940, training on the Lysander included mastering firing, technical reconnaissance, aerial photography, wireless telegraphy and night flying. In late January, the squadron moved to Lansdowne Park in Ottawa. Accommodation was cold, damp and

dirty under the football field grandstand. A farewell dinner was given and on 31 January the squadron was inspected and addressed by Prime Minister King.

On 13 February, the squadron boarded trains for Halifax. The next day, the 430 airmen of the squadron formed up and marched aboard the Duchess of Bedford. As the squadron travelled across the Atlantic, it was escorted on the sea and on the air. One of the participating pilots was Leonard Birchall, who later would become a wartime hero as the "Saviour of Ceylon," rose to Air Commodore, and was also an Honorary Colonel of 400 Squadron. The cross-Atlantic trip took 10 days, stopping at Liverpool. When 110 Squadron arrived, it represented the entire RCAF. The arrival was reported with embellishment in the media. The group was described as being comprised of farmers, fur trappers, Mounties, and former cowboys. In short a rough, tough Wild Western mob!

The squadron served in locations in Britain, France and Germany. The first operating station was Old Sarum in Salisbury. Ground training commenced with RAF fighter squadrons. Two Lysanders came on strength, part of an eventual plan of 18. Flying training started in March. Formation of the Canadian Corps took longer than anticipated, so the squadron was assigned to the British Army's IV Corps. Plans to move the squadron to France were cancelled after the German invasion of Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg

and push into France. With many RAF squadrons returning from France, 110 Squadron assisted with maintenance and servicing of the returning aircraft. The Squadron then moved to Odiham in Hampshire due to overcrowding at Old Sarum. The first casualty occurred on 17 July. In support of a Canadian Army simulated dive bombing exercise, an aircraft pulled up too late. It impacted the ground and both crew members were killed. Air raids over Britain intensified but all units in training including 110 Squadron were ordered to remain on the ground. Their only operational flights consisted of observing damage to British facilities. Inactivity was difficult for squadron personnel. Some asked to be transferred to fighter squadrons.



Two 400 Squadron Tomahawks on patrol. The SP letters indicates squadron identification. *Photo Courtesy - Larry Milberry*

In 1941, it was announced that 110 Squadron would be equipped with Tomahawks. During the wait for these aircraft, Lysanders were upgraded with newer guns and pigeon-carrying canisters. In January, the second tragedy occurred when a Lysander impacted the ground shortly after takeoff, killing the pilot and his gunner. By this time, the squadron numbering system caused considerable confusion, with the RAF having its own 110 Squadron. To avoid the confusion, the suffix CAN was used to differentiate

RCAF and RAF squadrons, but the suffix wasn't often used in communications. As a result, Canadian squadrons were allocated the block of numbers from 400 to 450.

Effective 1 March, 1941, 110 Squadron was renamed 400 Squadron RCAF, in recognition of being the first RCAF squadron in Britain. April marked the arrival of the Tomahawk. The next tragedy involved the loss of both crew in a Lysander that crashed in bad weather during a search for a Tiger Moth. The following day, a pilot was killed in a Tomahawk crash. He experienced mechanical problems and tried to land in a plowed farmer's field, causing the aircraft to cartwheel across the field. Finally, the squadron was declared operational in October 1941. Its first operational mission against the enemy, involving reconnaissance of the French coast, took place in November.

The first operational loss occurred in December 1941, when an aircraft didn't return after completing a mission over France while under attack from enemy fighters. In February 1942, a mid-air collision between a Tomahawk and a Tiger Moth killed three officers. Apart from flying, squadron life involved trips into nearby towns and farther afield, interaction with local residents, and sports. The squadron's hockey team won the overseas championship, boosting morale. Despite increasing missions over enemy territory,



400 Squadron Mustang Is somewhere in England
Photo Courtesy - The History Hangar

more casualties occurred during training than enemy action. Two more pilots died in Tomahawk crashes. Two Mustangs arrived in June 1942 to replace the Tomahawks. The first fatal Mustang crash occurred in bad weather shortly after July. 400 Squadron then deployed 12 aircraft, 17 pilots and groundcrews to Gatwick, to participate in air operations for the Dieppe Raid. Squadron pilots flew one third of the

reconnaissance sorties. One squadron aircraft was shot down during the raid. The squadron began to participate in more than recce ops, flying low-level intruder ops and engaging enemy targets. Its first aerial victory occurred in November, but another crash that month claimed the lives of two officers.

In December, S/L W.B. Woods received a DFC for his detachment support to the Coastal Command. In February 1943, the squadron was presented with its crest, signed by King George VI. The crest included an eagle's head. An eagle recognized the squadron's reconnaissance role and tomahawks represented the squadron's aircraft when the crest was applied for.

Later, in 1943, 400 Squadron suffered its first 'friendly fire' incident when a pilot was shot down by RAF aircraft. The Mustangs resembled some enemy aircraft. To avoid more tragedy, bands were painted around the wings and tail to improve identification by friendly aircraft. Flying over France meant more tragedies would occur. Three pilots survived after being shot down over France. Two became prisoners of war, but one avoided capture through France, Spain and then Gibraltar. He was finally reunited with his squadron almost one year after being shot down.

The squadron was dubbed "the train-busters" because of its ability in destroying enemy ground targets. Some enemy aircraft were downed as well and in November 1943 another pilot was awarded a DFC. The Mustang was ideally suited to low-level tactical recce and ground attack. However, there was growing emphasis on high-altitude, long range strategic recce. By the end of 1943, the squadron re-equipped with the Spitfire and the Mosquito. Both were unarmed and relied on altitude, speed and camouflage to evade interception.

By May 1944, the squadron was preparing for the invasion of continental Europe. On D-Day Minus One, 5 June, 400 Squadron completed about 15 photo sorties in preparation for the invasion, then supported the invasion throughout. On 1 July, a flight of aircraft moved to the continent, followed by groundcrew and admin staff. The full squadron joined a month later, almost four years after they originally planned to operate out of France.



(c) 1999 Rick Kent

400 Squadron Mustang MK I RCAF October 1942 Showing Identity White Band. *Graphic Courtesy - Rick Kent*



Spitfire PR.XI in wartime blue reconnaissance colours. *Photo Courtesy - USAF Museum*



An actual 400 Squadron Mosquito PR.XVI somewhere in England *Photo Courtesy - The History Hangar*

Late in 1944, Germany reserved their aircraft for an attack on Allied airfields in France. The attack, on New Year's Day, 1945, extensively damaged the squadron. Ten aircraft on the ground were destroyed. Five were in maintenance and only three operational aircraft were left. Luckily, no squadron personnel were injured. The Allies advanced rapidly toward Germany. 400 Squadron was an integral part of the advance. In April, the squadron followed the army across the Rhine and set up their operating location in Germany. As the war ended, the squadron conducted p.r. flights and monitored shipping before returning to Britain in

August and disbandment.

During the war, the squadron carried out 3,000 sorties, flew 19,000 flying hours, destroyed 183 locomotives and countless other ground targets. However, 31 lives were lost. The "firsts" credited to 400 Squadron included the first auxiliary unit formed, the first pipe band, the first RCAF squadron overseas, the first squadron to move to Normandy after D-Day, and the first RCAF squadron to cross the Rhine.

Postwar



400 Squadron Harvard II AH185. C.1950 The cowlings and rudders of 400 Squadron Harvards were painted in alternate blue & white stripes

Expeditor. In 1960, it upgraded with the versatile Otter, with a substantial increase in payload capability, room to move cargo loads of up to 2,000 pounds and space for nine people as well as the pilot and co-pilot. Support to the army increased and summer deployments moved to Petawawa.

With armed forces unification in 1968, 400 Squadron was renamed City of Toronto Air Reserve Squadron and reassigned from Air Transport Command to Mobile Command. On 10 June, 1961, the squadron was presented with its Squadron Standard in recognition of 25 years of continuous service. It was the first such presentation for an RCAF squadron. A thunderstorm arrived in the middle of the parade but it moved on quickly and ceremonies continued with a Sabre flypast. The Standard is proudly displayed and transferred from CO to CO during transfer of command every two years.

It was only fitting that 400 would be the first auxiliary squadron to fly after the war. In August 1946, it was equipped with the Harvard. In October of that year, it relocated to Downsview, redesignated 400 Fighter Squadron Auxiliary, and equipped with its first jet, the Vampire. It resumed summer deployments at Camp Borden with the Harvard and in 1949, with both aircraft, at RCAF Station Deseronto east of Trenton. It received its first Silver Star two-seat jet trainer in April 1955. In 1956, the squadron re-equipped with the Sabre Mk. 5. By 1958, Canada's role in the defence of North America was assigned to regular squadrons. 400 Squadron was then assigned to light transport and search and rescue, and equipped with the



400 Squadron at Downsview Mid - 1950's showing Harvard, Vampire and Sabrejet F-86 aircraft.



400 Squadron Otter 685 Photo - Canadian Air & Space Museum

400 Squadron began Northern operations, including supporting the Northwest Territories with aerial tracking of wildlife movements. Churchill, Manitoba, was an annual exercise location, with forward deployment farther into the North. The squadron was regularly tasked with SAR operations. In 1980, reserve units were reorganized and 400 Squadron was re-equipped with the CH 136 Kiowa, for training and light observation in direct support to the army. CFB Downsview was closed with military budget cuts in the 1990s.

With the CH 146 Griffon chosen to replace the Kiowa and the CH 135 Twin Huey fleets, 400 Squadron took on the Griffon in 1996. It absorbed 411 Squadron and moved to CFB Borden. The Griffon is currently flown in direct support of the army for reconnaissance and mobility roles. 400 Squadron retains its City of Toronto name and proud ties to the city. It has supported maintenance of the Early Warning System in the North during Exercise Hurricane, and completed VIP duties including the papal visit in 2002, and royal visits in 2009. In 2007, the RCAF bought five CC-177 Globemaster III heavy transports which among other things can hold three Griffons, extending the Griffon's reach to the North and around the world. In 2008, 400 Squadron took on a six-month unmanned aerial vehicle rotation in Kandahar, using an aircraft that is basically a flying camera and catapulted into the air for a subsequent soft landing and retrieval by squadron members.

The ops often didn't go as planned. In 2009, the regular Griffon squadrons deployed to Afghanistan. 400 Squadron supported those units in every rotation in Kandahar.

Flying a CH-147 Chinook helicopter on 5 August, 2010, 400 Squadron pilot Capt. William Fielding, was the first squadron pilot shot down since the Second World War. He landed the aircraft despite considerable fire, saving a full load of personnel who were soon rescued by ground forces. Capt. Fielding was awarded a Medal of Military Valour by the Governor General and flies with the squadron today. The squadron continues to fly in training and in support of operations in every reach of Canada. It was lead squadron for tactical helicopter support to both the Vancouver Winter Olympics and the G8 Summit in 2010. It also assisted in the Winnipeg floods in 2011 and supports fellow squadrons in any way it can, such as support of humanitarian disaster relief in the Philippines in 2012.

Afghanistan took a toll on the Griffons, so permanent force technicians were moved to the squadron to perform heavy maintenance and overhaul. While permanent members now greatly outnumber reservists, the reservists remain key in maintenance, test flying and ferrying aircraft to and from their home squadrons. 400 Squadron is also tasked with providing load teams, disassembling and loading Griffons on and off the CC-177s in support of operations in Iraq.

Here in Toronto, 400 Squadron annually fundraises and fly toys to Sick Children's Hospital in Operation Ho Ho Ho and participates in sports events. It sends a contingent to Sunnybrook Hospital every



Kiowa Helicopter on pylon at CFB Borden
Photo - Special thanks to Eric Dumigan

Remembrance Day. As LCol Bishop observed, 400 Squadron maintains the highest standard of service on its 85th anniversary. Paul Hayes thanked our speaker for a superb presentation covering the rich history of a fine squadron. In appreciation, Paul presented LCol Bishop with a gift of \$500 from the Chapter for Operation Ho Ho Ho this year and a copy of Dr. Robert Galway's book, *The Early Airfields of Toronto*.



400 Squadron Griffons and Chinook in
Afghanistan Artist - John Walmsley, Member CAAA. Courtesy of Carl Mills

The contents of this article were originally presented to the CAHS Toronto Chapter at a previous meeting or event. All / or some material has been edited and adapted for this website. Many thanks to CAHS Toronto Chapter for their courtesy in the use of this material. CAHS Toronto Chapter Meeting & Membership information is available elsewhere on this website.