

West Coast Aerodromes:

The Impact of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan on  
Delta and Abbotsford, British Columbia

by

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B.A., University of British Columbia, 2001  
B.Ed., University of British Columbia, 2004

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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## **Abstract**

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The plan to train Commonwealth pilots and aircrew on Canadian soil from 1939-1945 was a critical component to the Allied victory in the Second World War. As part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP), Canada graduated 131,553 men from training stations across the country. This thesis examines the experience of two British Columbia communities, Delta and Abbotsford, as hosts to BCATP stations. It concludes that both sites experienced a profound social and economic impact as a result of their role in training pilots and aircrew. Hosting a training station meant an immediate influx of jobs, infrastructure, money and excitement. In addition, the airfields left behind after the war ended still exist today as viable economic entities in their communities and as valuable hubs in Canada's aviation network.

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## **Dedication**

Written for Brigeeta and Lochlan

## Introduction and Historiography

The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) was a monumental part of Canada's war effort from 1939-1945. Canadian historian J.L. Granatstein called it the "the major Canadian military contribution to the war effort,"<sup>1</sup> while United States President Franklin Roosevelt referred to Canada as the "aerodrome of democracy" for the country's pivotal role in training allied pilots during World War Two.<sup>2</sup> By 1945, Canadian flight and aircrew training stations graduated 131,553 men from across the Commonwealth.<sup>3</sup> In order to meet the heavy demand for skilled pilots and aircrew, training facilities sprung up across the country almost instantaneously. For the communities that were home to a BCATP facility, the immediate and long-term impact was significant. Hosting a training station meant an influx of jobs, infrastructure, money and excitement. It brought the wartime experience closer than many thought possible, as civilians that once followed the war through newspaper and radio headlines now found themselves chatting with commonwealth aircrew in local diners and watching fighter pilots train in the skies above.

Despite the scope and sheer size of the BCATP, most of the historical research on the subject has taken a top-down approach, focusing on the political, administrative and training history of the plan. The plan's domestic history, while an equally compelling part of Canada's wartime history, has been left largely

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<sup>1</sup> J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government* (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1975), 43.

<sup>2</sup> F.J. Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy: Canada and the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan* (Ottawa: Directorate of History, Department of National Defence, 1983), iv.

<sup>3</sup> W.A.B. Douglas, *The Creation of a National Air Force*, (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1989), 293.

unexplored. Canada's ability to train and deploy aircrew as quickly as it did was a critical part of the war effort, and the resulting influx of Commonwealth men into communities across the country had a profound effect on Canada's wartime and post-war identity. In the end, more than eighty cities and towns ended up hosting training schools<sup>4</sup>, the vast majority of them located in smaller rural environments, which were particularly sensitive to the effects of the plan.

Thus, the goal of this research is to contribute to the body of knowledge on the domestic history of the BCATP. The limited research that has been done in this area is focused almost exclusively on the Prairie Provinces, which leaves the experiences of numerous communities across the country untold. This thesis, then, will make a modest contribution to the beginnings of the historiography of the BCATP in British Columbia. More specifically, it will tell the story of two BC communities that hosted flight training schools during the Second World War, interpreting the impact, influence and legacy of the BCATP on Delta and Abbotsford.

To this end, the following historical analysis of the BCATP will first identify and address the major works written on the topic. Second, it will explore the historiographical debates that arise out of these works, as well as the areas that remain largely unexplored. Generally speaking, there are four major issues that characterize the writing and research focused on the BCATP: financing and administration, Canadianization, pilot training, and the domestic impact of the training stations.

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas, *The Creation of a National Air Force*, appendix map.

The first major work to address the BCATP was C.P. Stacey's book *Arms, Men and Government: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945*. This book attempts to tell, "simply and directly, the story of the military policies of Canada during the Second World War in their main aspects."<sup>5</sup> Here one finds the first detailed commentary of the BCATP, making it a logical place to start when looking at the historiography of the subject. Not only was Stacy the first historian to look closely at the developments and problems that characterized the program, but many future historians drew upon his work as a major reference source to frame their analysis.

Although the BCATP was only part of Stacey's book, he provided a comprehensive review of the contentious negotiations that took place between Canada and Great Britain over how the program would be operated and who would exert administrative control. He states that the story of the BCATP must be told in some detail for three main reasons: because the plan was a vitally important element in Canada's war effort; that the circumstances of its inception reveal a great deal about the "springs" of Canadian policy in 1939; and that the absence of an official history of the RCAF means that the story has never been fully told.<sup>6</sup>

Some thirteen years after Stacey's call for a comprehensive work on the BCATP, F.J. Hatch's 1983 book *The Aerodrome of Democracy: Canada and the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan* in 1983 examined the undertaking of the BCATP, how the plan took shape, pilot and crew training, as well as its

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<sup>5</sup> C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer for Canada, 1970), vi.

<sup>6</sup> Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*, 17.

relationship with RAF schools and the Americans. Hatch's book is significant for a number of reasons. First, he was the first historian to look exclusively at the BCATP. Second, his research led to a number of important conclusions that were inconsistent with the works that came both before and after his book was published in 1983.

Heeding the advice of C.P. Stacey, the first volume of the *Official History* of the RCAF was published in 1980, with the second and third volumes coming in 1986 and 1994 respectively. The story of the BCATP is found in volume two, titled *The Creation of a National Air Force*, authored primarily by W.A.B. Douglas. This volume focuses on the formation of the RCAF and the air defence of Canada and the North Atlantic. In his account of the BCATP, Douglas focuses on the financial and administrative aspects of the plan. With respect to pilot training, Douglas acknowledges that the vast output of pilots and aircrews was successful in meeting British expectations, but asserts that quantity was only half of the training equation.<sup>7</sup> To him, any assessment of the training plan must also include the quality of training the airmen received.

Following the *Official History* account of the BCATP was Allan English's 1996 book *The Cream of the Crop*. It is best known for its analysis of aviation psychology, or more specifically, the RCAF and the stigma of the "Lacking Morale Fibre" label. Within this discussion, however, English also highlights a number of other important themes that cropped up during the war, such as the value of the airmen, British-Canadian relations, and Canadianization. English concludes that because there were no "institutional means" to preserve the

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<sup>7</sup> Douglas, *The Creation of a National Air Force*, 267.

lessons of the past, the RCAF “was condemned to repeat the errors of its World War I predecessors.”<sup>8</sup> Simply put, this meant that the RAF and RCAF continued to rely on outdated methods. While he acknowledges that the BCATP did experience some success, its training plan was, for the most part, fragmented and behind the times.

The four works outlined thus far constitute the only major histories to focus a significant portion of their research on Canada’s role in the formation and development of the BCATP. When one looks beyond them, there are two main types of commentaries: those that are part of a broader RCAF or Second World War history, or those classified as popular histories, consisting largely of archived photographs and secondary source references. Nevertheless, a number of these broader works do make insightful and original contributions into the history of the BCATP and are thus worth referencing.

The first of these works is T.W. Melnyk’s 1996 book *Canadian Flying Operations in South East Asia, 1941-1945*. He writes that the RCAF was represented in every theatre of operation during the Second World War because the BCATP prepared Canadian pilots to fight in the various theatres; the very nature of the program meant that Canadian airmen would be widely distributed throughout the globe.<sup>9</sup> W.A.B. Douglas and Brereton Greenhous, co-authors of the 1977 book *Out of the Shadows: Canada in the Second World War*, saw the plan as a strategic victory on one hand but questioned the training methods and

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<sup>8</sup> English, Allan. *The Cream of the Crop: Canadian Aircrew, 1939-1945* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1996), 60.

<sup>9</sup> T.W. Melnyk, *Canadian Flying Operations in South East Asia* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 1976), 165.

operational skills gained by the graduates.<sup>10</sup> Desmond Morton deals with the BCATP briefly in one chapter of his 1999 book, *A Military History of Canada*. His discussion of the topic is contextualized as part of King's overall war policies, which he argues were designed to avoid the problems that led Robert Borden, the Prime Minister during the First World War, into trouble. Simply put, it was the concept of limiting Canada's overseas commitment that guided the formation of the BCATP.<sup>11</sup> William Carter's 1991 work, *Anglo-Canadian Wartime Relations, 1939-1945* looks at Royal Air Force (RAF) Bomber Command and a Canadian bomber group to evaluate Canadian-British and RCAF-RAF relations. Carter divides his work into three main sections: Canadian Airmen and their RAF counterparts; moral; and discipline. He concludes that strained RAF-RCAF relations were commonplace and a product of poor training which did not help Canadians adjust to the "spit and polish" of the British officers.<sup>12</sup>

The works of Stacey, Hatch, Douglas and English, combined with those mentioned above, represent the major contributions to the political, administrative and training history of the BCATP. As is often the case, these historians are not in complete agreement over the major themes that characterize BCATP historiography. First, there is a debate around the negotiations between Canada and Great Britain regarding the administrative and financial aspects of the plan. Stacey believes that limiting Canada's financial commitment was King's main concern, with administrative control and the issue of Canadianization ranking

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<sup>10</sup> W.A.B Douglas and Brereton Greenhous, *Out of the Shadows: Canada in the Second World War* (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1977), 40-41, 184.

<sup>11</sup> Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1999), 180.

<sup>12</sup> William Carter, *Anglo-Canadian Wartime Relations, 1939-1945: RAF Bomber Command and No. 6 [Canadian] Group* (New York: Garland, 1991), 92.

second and third respectively.<sup>13</sup> Hatch, on the other hand, saw political pressures as the real influence behind Canada's negotiating stance, specifically Canadian governmental control over the training procedures.<sup>14</sup> Douglas aligns himself with Hatch on this issue, but takes into account the financial imperatives as well. He also argues that the principal advantage of the BCATP was to allow Canada to contribute to the war while limiting its overseas commitment, thus avoiding another potential conscription crisis.<sup>15</sup>

The second major issue debated among historians is the level of training received by the graduates of the BCATP. Stacey alludes to the "genuine effectiveness" of an all Canadian bomber group.<sup>16</sup> Hatch reiterates this point as he believes that pilot graduates "were carefully selected and well-trained" despite the problems that came along with mass production and the pressures of meeting quotas and deadlines.<sup>17</sup> Melnyk agrees, asserting that BCATP training prepared Canadian airmen to participate in all theatres of war, indicative of the broad training the graduates received.<sup>18</sup> Douglas, however, disagrees with these assessments, pointing out that inept instructors, poor training equipment, technological gaps, and a lack of operational experience meant that many airmen did not receive the high level of training previously believed. Furthermore, he concludes that the effectiveness of the BCATP can be measured in terms of quantity not quality. The Allies simply won a manpower war with Germany, not

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<sup>13</sup> Stacey, *Arms Men and Government*, 23.

<sup>14</sup> Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy*, 21.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas, *The Creation of a National Air Force*, 293.

<sup>16</sup> Stacey, *Arms Men and Government*, 305-306.

<sup>17</sup> Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy*, 154-155.

<sup>18</sup> Melnyk, *Canadian Flying Operations in South East Asia*, 165.

one based on high levels of training or operational effectiveness.<sup>19</sup> For his part, English tends to sit on the fence on this issue. While he admits that the BCATP produced “well-prepared aviators” throughout the war, he is quick to point out that wide variations in standards between schools meant that training was not universally sound. He believes that a focus on quality, rather than quantity, would have lessened losses and improved relations between the RAF and the RCAF.<sup>20</sup> As Carter illustrates, however, looking at training standards must go beyond the instruction that the pilots received while in the cockpit. The focus on operational training, which many argue was already deficient, took away from conduct training. This in turn meant many strained relationships between RCAF and RAF personnel, as Canadian airmen were resistant to the military formalities of the British officers.<sup>21</sup>

The issue of Canadianization, or ensuring Canadian pilots served under Canadian officers, was the third prominent issue discussed by historians. On this issue there is agreement, all describing Canadianization as a positive development for Canadian airmen. Stacey concludes that the demands of Canadianization were met by 1943 and that RCAF squadrons and bomber groups were playing an instrumental role in winning the war.<sup>22</sup> That being said, he asserts that it was the Canadian government’s refusal to pay its own costs that delayed this process until midway through the war.<sup>23</sup> Morton agrees with this assessment, claiming that Ottawa did not care that Canadian graduates

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<sup>19</sup> Douglas, *The Creation of a National Air Force*, 293.

<sup>20</sup> English, *The Cream of the Crop*, 60.

<sup>21</sup> Carter, *Anglo-Canadian Wartime Relations*, 92.

<sup>22</sup> Stacey, *Arms, Men and Government*, 306.

<sup>23</sup> Stacey, *Arms, Men and Government*, 306-307.

disappeared into the RAF and that even RCAF squadrons were paid for by British taxpayers. To him, Canadianization was delayed because of the frugality of the Canadian government: cheapness outweighed nationalism.<sup>24</sup>

When looking at the administration, financing, training and Canadian service with regard to the BCATP, there is little agreement among historians. They disagree over the issues that prompted King to accept the plan as well as the platform from which he negotiated Canada's position. Was it financial or political imperatives that dictated the policy making? Just as disagreement exists over the political and diplomatic side of the plan, the same can also be said for the training the BCATP graduates received. Most authors praise the level of training the graduates received, with Hatch remarking that it "earned the RCAF a lasting reputation for the soundness of its flying training methods."<sup>25</sup> Douglas, however, insists that training standards were sub-par due to poor instructors, poor equipment, and a constantly changing syllabus.<sup>26</sup> On the issue of Canadianization, all authors agree it was one of King's priorities when negotiating the plan, while his initial refusal to pay for Canada's share delayed its implementation.

The prominent themes addressed by BCATP historians have largely constituted a top-down approach focused on the political, financial and training aspects of the plan. As a result, very little has been written on the fourth historiographical issue mentioned earlier; the domestic history of the BCATP. More specifically, the impact of the plan on communities that hosted BCATP

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<sup>24</sup> Morton, *A Military History of Canada*, 180.

<sup>25</sup> Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy*, 152.

<sup>26</sup> Douglas, *The Creation of a National Air Force*, 293.

bases has been largely overlooked. Hatch's work certainly started the process of addressing these issues, but English calls it "a mere sketch" given the sheer size of the undertaking.<sup>27</sup>

Brereton Greenhous and Norman Hillmer were the first to touch upon the subject with their 1981 article titled "The Impact of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan on Western Canada: Some Saskatchewan Case Studies."

Although BCATP bases were established all across Canada, they focused their attention on Saskatchewan, feeling that the province would be "particularly sensitive to the effects of the plan" given the high concentration of BCATP schools.<sup>28</sup> Focusing on communities such as Yorkton and Weyburn, the authors conclude that although the influence and impact of the BCATP can be difficult to measure in any precise terms, there can be little doubt "that the immediate impact of a BCATP school on a community was substantial, and that the smaller the community, the greater the impact."<sup>29</sup> In economic terms, service industries benefitted immediately, with long term impact more difficult to measure given the "generalized prosperity of wartime" and the national and provincial social benefits that appeared after the war.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, communities considered the economic benefit to be enormous, which helped to account for the warm welcome and good relations that existed between BCATP personnel and the host community.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> English, *The Cream of the Crop*, 214.

<sup>28</sup> Brereton Greenhous and Norman Hillmer, "The Impact of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan on Western Canada: Some Saskatchewan Case Studies," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 16.3 (1981): 133-144.

<sup>29</sup> Greenhous and Hillmer, "The Impact of the BCATP," 141.

<sup>30</sup> Greenhous and Hillmer, "The Impact of the BCATP," 141.

<sup>31</sup> Greenhous and Hillmer, "The Impact of the BCATP," 142.

Peter Conrad's 1989 book *Training for Victory: The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in the West* analyzes the impact that various bases had on Canada's Prairie Provinces and the cities in which they were located. While his discussion of the broader diplomatic and military issues is based almost exclusively on secondary sources, he uses a blend of personnel interviews and town newspapers to paint a picture of how the airmen were received, and the impact they had on the small towns they found themselves living in. These towns and cities, he wrote, "vied for the honour of hosting a school. Runways were constructed, housing built, and local residents provided support and services...Despite occasional friction between the townsfolk and their temporary guests, people pulled together in a time of need..."<sup>32</sup> For example, he cites one small town newspaper, the *Estevan Mercury*, which published a farewell article when the BCATP shut down its base in February 1944. An excerpt reads:

In spite of the extreme cold a crowd estimated at 500 thronged the full length of the train, and with cars honking, good-byes being shouted and people waving, the train pulled out into the darkness with its tail lights gradually dimming until they had disappeared in the murk of the RAF.<sup>33</sup>

To Conrad, the fact that there was a great deal of enthusiasm among the civilian population for the departing aircrew indicates a good relationship between the air stations and the host communities. Furthermore, his findings suggest this goodwill was directed not only at the Canadians but also the British, Australian,

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<sup>32</sup> Peter Conrad, *Training for Victory: The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in the West* (Saskatoon: Western Producer, 1989), inside front cover.

<sup>33</sup> *Estevan Mercury*, quoted in Conrad, *Training for Victory*, 90.

New Zealand, Indian, Free French, Czechoslovakian, Norwegian, Polish, Belgian, and Dutch airmen.<sup>34</sup>

Two years after Conrad's work, Spencer Dunmore wrote *Wings For Victory: The Remarkable Story of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in Canada*. Although Dunmore does not focus exclusively on the BCATP's impact on Canadian communities, he does devote a chapter of his book to the interactions between communities and the BCATP trainees. Titled "Town and Country," this chapter's conclusions are in line with those of Greenhous, Hillmer and Conrad. Dunmore illustrates the generally positive interactions between communities and base personnel, with western hospitality sometimes even embarrassing some RAF and veterans, who found Canada to be a "glittering haven of plenty" when compared to the shortages of blacked-out Britain.<sup>35</sup>

For the communities themselves, Dunmore discusses how a BCATP base meant significant economic benefits. For hard hit towns, being selected to host a base meant an influx of construction jobs, infrastructure, and military men who would infuse money into the local economy.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, for towns like Weyburn that had already been "accustomed to wartime prosperity," news of their selection was less of an "immediate euphoria" as opposed to a quiet satisfaction as they knew that much of the infrastructure built would be there long after the war ended.<sup>37</sup> Thus, whether a town was keen to land a base because of immediate or long-term benefits, his account is the same. Those chosen to host

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<sup>34</sup> Conrad, *Training for Victory*, 90.

<sup>35</sup> Spencer Dumore, *Wings for Victory: The Remarkable Story of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991), 214.

<sup>36</sup> Dumore, *Wings for Victory*, 209.

<sup>37</sup> Dunmore, *Wings for Victory*, 209.

a base were pleased with the decision, and those that were overlooked advocated for their inclusion.<sup>38</sup>

Several conclusions can be made about the impact of the BCATP on Prairie communities. First, most were keen to host a base given the perceived economic benefits that would follow. In time, these perceived benefits became a reality, as all of the authors found a measureable BCATP impact on the communities they studied. Second, the relationship between the communities and flight personnel was a positive one. While there were undoubtedly some skirmishes along the way, the relationship between the two groups was characterized by acceptance and respect.

Despite the important contributions that these works make, the domestic history of the BCATP is woefully incomplete. In trying to understand the impact that this massive plan had on Canadian communities, one is left with only a handful of books, chapters and articles dedicated exclusively to the subject. In addition, these works limit the scope of their research almost exclusively to Saskatchewan. This is not a criticism of the authors. Indeed, in hosting far more bases than other western provinces, Saskatchewan merits closer study.<sup>39</sup> In addition to the sheer number of bases influencing their research, many who wrote about the importance of the bases for Prairie communities framed their discussion around the backdrop of the Great Depression and the hope that BCATP bases brought to many struggling communities. While British Columbia was far from immune from the impact of the Great Depression, the image of the

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<sup>38</sup>Dunmore, *Wings for Victory*, 207.

<sup>39</sup>Douglas, *The Creation of a National Air Force*, Map Appendix.

vast dustbowl synonymous with Saskatchewan and Manitoba provided an even greater juxtaposition for historians of the Prairies to focus on. In some ways British Columbia's bases, located in a small geographic area around the lower mainland and on Vancouver Island, may not have been as attractive to historians seeking out an answer to just how important these bases were to their host communities.

The goal of this thesis is to therefore pick up where these historians left off, looking closely at Delta and Abbotsford, British Columbia to determine how the BCATP impacted them. There is no shortage of locations as both Vancouver and Sea Island hosted Pilot Training Facilities while Abbotsford, Delta, Patricia Bay and Comox hosted both Pilot Training as well as Aircrew Training Facilities. None of these cities or towns were mentioned in any of the works discussed earlier, making them an ideal choice to look at how the BCATP impacted British Columbia communities. Furthermore, many of these bases were built specially for the BCATP and then left behind as a resource for civilians and communities to utilize.

Before going on to tell part of the story of the BCATP in British Columbia, however, it is important to properly contextualize the impact the war had on Canadian communities. From a political and military perspective, Canada's Second World War experience has been well-documented and is often presented in a positive light. Despite the obvious hardships and loss of life, books titled *The Good War* and *The Best War Ever* are reflective of this, telling the story of democracy's triumph over fascism, often simplified to a narrative of good over

evil.<sup>40</sup> From a local perspective, however, there are many stories besides those of battlefield encounters and steely political decision-making that need to be told. The domestic impact of the war, and by extension the BCATP, is an equally compelling story. For the British Columbia communities that hosted military bases and BCATP stations, issues surrounding women, youth, morality, employment and housing were also an important part of their wartime experience.

The historiography of the BCATP mirrors, in many ways, the historiography of Canada and the Second World War. While the political and military history have occupied historians, the war's role in unleashing new social and moral issues has received a fraction of the attention.<sup>41</sup> Jeff Keshen's work *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers* attempts to fill much of this void as he discusses the war's perceived role in "unleashing socially and morally destructive trends."<sup>42</sup> The war, he argues, had a profound impact on the home front and acted as a "social accelerator, thrusting people and groups into situations that challenged existing social conventions."<sup>43</sup> More specifically, issues surrounding the role and women and youth, employment rates and statistics, housing, and the broader concept of morality, are explored. While these issues are sometimes broad in their context, they also play an important role in helping to understand the much more specific impact that BCATP bases had on their host communities.

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<sup>40</sup> Jeffrey Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>41</sup> Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers*, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers*, 9.

Of all the social changes triggered by the Second World War, the role of women in Canada may be one of the most documented and well-researched. Ruth Roach Pierson has published numerous works on the subject, including *Canadian Women and the Second World War* and *They're Still Women Afterall*. Pierson writes that the new role that women occupied during the war “had been linked to a wider role and larger responsibility in the nation’s affairs. The question after the war was to what extent that wider role and larger responsibility would be maintained.”<sup>44</sup> Throughout the war, women found themselves working in jobs previously reserved exclusively for men. Not only were they working in industrial and manufacturing positions, the war also gave birth to the first Women’s Divisions, with the Canadian Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (CWAAF) brought into being in July 1941 and the Canadian Women’s Army Corps (CWAC) following a month later. The Navy was the last to open its doors, with the Women’s Royal Canadian Naval Service (WRCNS) formed in July 1942.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the infusion of women into the services and private sector work, Pierson argues that gender stereotypes persisted after the war, and that the massive mobilization of women “failed to secure them a genuinely equal place in the postwar public world.”<sup>46</sup> Keshen agrees with Pierson for the most part, pointing out that Canadian women still faced tremendous challenges in the 1950s despite wartime advances. He tempers this assessment, however, by arguing that “progressive legacies flowed from...wartime trends” and that “transformations such as a growing permanent presence of working wives and

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<sup>44</sup> Ruth Roach Pierson, *Canadian Women and the Second World War* (Ottawa: CHA, 1983), 4.

<sup>45</sup> Pierson, *Canadian Women and the Second World War*, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Pierson, *Canadian Women and the Second World War*, 5.

weak legislation mandating equal pay for equal work represented notable breakthroughs for females.”<sup>47</sup>

For the purpose of this study, the history of the BCATP in Canada is directly linked to the evolution of women’s roles during the Second World War. In fact, one of the catalysts for women’s entrance into the service was the arrival of Britain’s Women’s Auxiliary Air Force to assist with BCATP. Keshen argues that this “example” convinced Ottawa to first recruit women for auxiliary service overseas.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, women played an important role in many BCATP bases, including those in BC, which were some of the first to employ women for both civilian and enlisted occupations.

While the role of women in society changed drastically during the Second World War, children and youth in wartime Canada also found themselves in a state of flux. Communities across the country grappled with these developments, and those that hosted military bases were especially aware of trends that often dismayed of local parents and educators. In her work, *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of Modern Canada, 1920-1950*, Cynthia Comacchio explores this issue in great detail. For many Canadian communities, delinquency, tardiness, promiscuity and venereal diseases were viewed as a threat to modern youth.<sup>49</sup> Governments became inclined to take up the cause of

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<sup>47</sup> Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers*, 171.

<sup>48</sup> Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers*, 176.

<sup>49</sup> Cynthia Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of Modern Canada, 1920 to 1950* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier UP, 2006), 40.

protecting the mental and physical health of the young population,<sup>50</sup> amidst increasing worries about moral decline and social instability.<sup>51</sup>

In the context of this study, two pertinent conclusions are drawn by the authors. Keshen points out that whether these trends were real or exaggerated, they led to efforts and initiatives that “affected, often profoundly, countless Canadians – children, working women and service women, girlfriends, labourers and farmers, tenants, and landlords, and shoppers and shopkeepers.”<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore, Comacchio argues that while both young men and women were impacted by these trends, when observers spoke with concern about youth morality, promiscuity and sexuality, “they were primarily, if not exclusively, discussing young women.”<sup>53</sup>

While Canadian communities witnessed a great deal of social change during the war, they were also impacted by changes in employment and housing. For those that built and hosted BCATP sites, these impacts were especially prominent. Aerodromes called for a great deal of labour to build and maintain, while the personnel who served at them often turned to the local community for service and accommodation. Keshen points out that construction connected to the BCATP had a profound economic impact, sometimes precipitating “boom conditions” in small communities where the local labour pool was drawn upon.<sup>54</sup> In addition, BCATP bases frequently hired civilian air training clubs to train pilots, while also offering employment for mechanics, janitors, cooks and

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<sup>50</sup> Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 41.

<sup>51</sup> Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers*, 226-227.

<sup>52</sup> Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers*, 226.

<sup>53</sup> Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 41.

<sup>54</sup> Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers*, 48-50.

stenographers.<sup>55</sup> There was also a spinoff employment effect in many communities as aircrew on leave generated a great deal of business in cafes, shops and diners, further increasing employment rates.<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, this sharp increase in job opportunities was not mentioned in any of the province's labour journals.<sup>57</sup>

While the influx of personnel generated jobs on a multitude of levels, it also placed a strain on many local housing markets. Migration during the war was common in most major cities, with Montreal welcoming 250,000 people, Toronto 100,000, and Ottawa 24,000.<sup>58</sup> This migration placed a significant strain on major cities, with Vancouver's vacancy rate falling to just 0.257 percent in 1942.<sup>59</sup> In *Housing for All: The Struggle for Social Housing in Vancouver, 1919-1950*, Jill Wade illustrates the situation's steady decline until it reached a critical point in 1945.<sup>60</sup> The influx of workers, migrants and servicemen's families intensified the need for housing, as exemplified by Vancouver's 80.5 percent increase in employment.<sup>61</sup> These accommodation challenges became crises in many smaller communities that were home to army or air force bases, as some BCATP sites saw family members of trainees forced to take up residence in barns, storage bins, or shanty-towns that sprung up on the edge of the bases.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy*, 118.

<sup>56</sup> Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers*, 50.

<sup>57</sup> Employment developments, as a result of BCATP construction, were not mentioned in the *BC Workers Review*, the *BC Federationist* or the *Pacific Coast News*.

<sup>58</sup> Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers*, 77.

<sup>59</sup> *Canadian Congress Journal*, July 1942, as quoted in Keshan, 77.

<sup>60</sup> Jill Wade, *Houses for All: The Struggle for Social Housing in Vancouver, 1919-1950* (Vancouver: UBC, 1994), 93.

<sup>61</sup> Wade, *Houses for All*, 95-96.

<sup>62</sup> Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers*, 79.

According to Dunmore, housing problems persisted throughout the war wherever BCATP bases were located.<sup>63</sup> This strain is also documented by Gordon Taylor in *Delta's Century of Progress*, a local history of the community. Taylor wrote that Ladner was “static” until the RCAF station opened and brought with it an influx in population which strained the town’s capacity to accommodate it.<sup>64</sup> He also notes the rapid population increase that began in 1941 and attributes this to the wartime developments and the BCATP.<sup>65</sup>

The historiography of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, combined with that of the war’s impact on Canadian communities, provides the necessary context to address the history of the BCATP in BC. This is a history that has not yet been told, despite every indication that these aerodromes had a profound impact on the BC communities in which they were built. Thus, the towns of Delta and Abbotsford will be used as case studies to add to the body of knowledge on the BCATP. Telling the story of RCAF Station Boundary Bay without that of RCAF Station Abbotsford would be to break up a connection that existed since 1940. Both communities fought to host Elementary Flight Training School (EFTS) No. 8 in 1940. The school was awarded to Delta in 1941, moved to Caron Saskatchewan in 1942, and then relocated back to Abbotsford in 1943. In addition, both communities played host to Operational Training Unit (OTU) Number 5, as it was opened in Delta in 1943 with a detachment of the same school opening in Abbotsford shortly thereafter. In addition to the intertwined

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<sup>63</sup> Dunmore, *Wings for Victory*, 212.

<sup>64</sup> Gordon Taylor, *Delta's Century of Progress* (Clearbrook: Kerfoot-Holmes Printing, 1958), 61.

<sup>65</sup> Taylor, *Delta's Century of Progress*, 71.

history of the two stations, Delta and Abbotsford were also chosen because they offer an excellent opportunity to assess both the immediate impact and legacy of the plan. Both sites were selected and built solely as a result of the BCATP mandate to train pilots and flight personnel, they had a profound social and economic impact on their host communities, and they still exist today as viable economic entities in their communities and as valuable hubs in Canada's aviation infrastructure.

## RCAF Station Boundary Bay: Delta and the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan

Prominently displayed across the front page of the 26 June 1941 edition of the Ladner *Optimist* was the announcement that Prime Minister Mackenzie King would be in town the following week to officially open No. 18 Elementary Flight Training School in Delta.<sup>66</sup> Not only was the community thrilled to have the school officially opened, it also “added emphasis to the fact that this [was] the first visit to the Delta Municipality by Prime Minister King.”<sup>67</sup> When King arrived one week later to officially open No. 18 EFTS, some five thousand people greeted him to cheer the opening of the school.<sup>68</sup> This number is even more remarkable given that the entire population of Delta in 1941 was, according to official census numbers, only 4,287.<sup>69</sup> It is not difficult to imagine the impact that such an event would have given the massive influx of people, which in itself is a testament to just how important the airfield was to the community of Delta and those around it. Praising the BCATP, King spoke about the important contribution that communities like Delta were making to the war effort, stating that “it [was] destined to become the decisive factor in the winning of this war against the Hun.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Optimist*, 26 June 1941.

<sup>67</sup> *Optimist*, 26 June 1941.

<sup>68</sup> RCAF Daily Diary: No. 18 Elementary Flight Training School, Boundary Bay, Delta, B.C., 2 July 1941.

<sup>69</sup> BC Stats: British Columbia Municipal Census Population 1921-2006.

[www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/pop/mun/mun1921\\_2006.asp](http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/pop/mun/mun1921_2006.asp) (17 May 2011)

<sup>70</sup> *Optimist*, 2 July 1941.

There is little doubt that King's visit to the small Delta community was a newsworthy event, described as a "red letter day" in the history of Delta."<sup>71</sup> Despite the obvious excitement that accompanied the visit, it represented only one day of what would become a four year relationship between the airfield and the community. From rumour to conception, implementation, and closure, No. 18 EFTS and No. 5 OTU would become a cornerstone of Delta's connection to the war.

### **The Evolution of an Airfield**

Long before King's visit to Delta, the community looked forward to the opportunity to host a BCATP base. Much like the communities located across the depression ravaged Prairie Provinces, being selected as a site to host one of the BCATP sites was akin to winning the lottery. Someone had to provide the raw materials, build the infrastructure and provide the services that airmen from across the world would demand. It would undoubtedly mean jobs, economic stimulation, excitement and prosperity to towns in dire need of a positive development.

After many months of speculation, rumours and unsubstantiated reports, the citizenship of Delta received official word that it would be home to one of the many flight schools developed by the Canadian government and the RCAF as part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. Organizational Order No. 99, drafted 12 February 1941, formalized plans in development since the spring

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<sup>71</sup> Daily Diary No. 18 EFTS, 2 July 1941.

of 1940 calling for the formation of No. 18 Elementary Flight Training School in Boundary Bay BC.<sup>72</sup> Due to the continued expansion of the BCATP, it became necessary to open the eighteenth EFTS to train pilots capable of contributing to war effort. The base would be operated by a civilian company, using RCAF aircraft, and would be carried out on 10 April 1941.<sup>73</sup>

While the official order providing logistics for the base's construction did not come until 1941, the municipality of Delta was confirmed as a BCATP site in August 1940. When the decision was announced the *Optimist* headline read: "Air Training School to be Opened Here In Central Delta Will Benefit District."<sup>74</sup> Like other EFTS's across the country, Delta would be charged with providing the land and infrastructure to train air personnel from across the Commonwealth to fight the air war against Germany and its allies. No. 18 EFTS, operating in conjunction with training already being carried out on Sea Island, would constitute the largest EFTS in the country.<sup>75</sup>

The immediate response of the community, as measured by its local newspaper, was one of excitement. The community believed that it had the perfect geographical profile to accommodate such a plan. The area finally chosen, between Benson and Tasker Roads, was comprised of farmland owned by local citizens Reeve Paterson, Fred Robinson and Alex Fisher. These landowners agreed to lease 480 acres of "eminently suitable" land to the

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<sup>72</sup> RCAF Organizational Order No. 99: Formation of No. 18 Elementary Flight Training School, 12 February 1941.

<sup>73</sup> Organizational Order No. 99.

<sup>74</sup> *Optimist*, 29 August 1940.

<sup>75</sup> Daily Diary No. 18 EFTS, 10 April 1941. *Delta Optimist*, 12 December 1940.

government.<sup>76</sup> Fitting with the mandate laid out by the RCAF, the area was flat and level with no obstructions of any kind for miles in each direction.<sup>77</sup> Surveyors from the Federal Government analyzed the suitability of the area and compared it to locations in Langley, Abbotsford and Chilliwack before finally settling on Delta.<sup>78</sup> In the end, it was the “milder climate, with less wind, that prevailed all year round that had much to do with the decision.”<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, the lack of fog and the distance from any mountainous terrain clinched the deal according to George Cruickshank, MP for the Fraser Valley, who saw his community initially overlooked to host a base.<sup>80</sup>

The use of this land, situated in the heart of Delta, was the first of many impacts on the community. Rental of the land was received favourably by the public, but one is forced to wonder about the reaction of the farmers whose land was appropriated and leased by the Federal Government. Ottawa paid \$211,960.75 for the land that it acquired over the course of the war, leasing a total of 1144 acres from a total of nine different Delta citizens. E.M. Patterson gave up the largest amount of land, supplying 420 acres for the sum of a little over \$76,000.<sup>81</sup>

In anticipation of the school opening in April 1941, construction began late in 1940, with Northern Construction and J.W. Stuart Ltd receiving a contract of

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<sup>76</sup> *Optimist*, 29 August 1940.

<sup>77</sup> *Optimist*, 29 August 1940.

<sup>78</sup> *Optimist*, 29 August 1940.

<sup>79</sup> *Optimist*, 29 August 1940.

<sup>80</sup> *Optimist*, 29 August 1940.

<sup>81</sup> Department of Transport, Property Records Division, Property Abstracts for Boundary Bay Airport 1940-1983. Ottawa, Ontario.

over \$210,000 for the project.<sup>82</sup> RCAF engineers developed plans for the base at a Ladner Office and determined the project would incorporate eleven buildings, a double hangar and of course the runways and airfield.<sup>83</sup> A project of this magnitude required a great deal of labour, and one of the stipulations made by the Federal Government was that “Delta men be given preference for any work available.”<sup>84</sup> It was reported that the contract for the gravel and rock to be used on the runway would be tendered to a lower mainland business while a civil aviation company would be hired to operate the field.<sup>85</sup> Local men were to be employed in much of the construction of the field including the runways, hangar and surrounding buildings. Furthermore, local businesses were also excited by the prospect although the immediate economic benefits were, in their eyes, undetermined.<sup>86</sup> Municipal Council also saw the opportunities presented by the plan in a positive light, although they acknowledged that construction of the airfield would require solving some logistical problems. Past precedent suggested, however, that negotiations with the Federal Government would help alleviate many of these concerns.<sup>87</sup>

As construction began in the winter of 1940, word of the size and scope of the project began to spread through the community. Leslie Martin, President of the Boundary Bay Flying Training Company, reported that Delta would in fact be

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<sup>82</sup> *Optimist*, 5 December 1940.

<sup>83</sup> *Optimist*, 5 December 1940.

<sup>84</sup> *Optimist*, 5 December 1940.

<sup>85</sup> *Optimist*, 29 August 1940.

<sup>86</sup> *Optimist*, 29 August 1940.

<sup>87</sup> *Optimist*, 29 August 1940.

home to the largest Elementary Flight Training School in Canada.<sup>88</sup> A detailed article in the local newspaper reported that initial projections saw more than sixty planes being stationed at the Air Training School with approximately five hundred men stationed in the town at any given time.<sup>89</sup> Tom Reid, the MP for the area, was quoted as saying “a little town” was likely to spring up around the field. Reid also reported on the great potential of the school and its dramatic impact on the community. First, the influx of men would mean an immediate population increase of 10 percent, all of which were young able bodied workers who would look to the town to meet many of their daily needs. Financially, the government set up “the machinery” to control the profits of the airfields as well as the \$800,000 dollars that would be spent in connection with the school. Not only would construction workers and tradesmen be employed to build the school, but the schools would also see clerks and accountants employed as well.<sup>90</sup>

The Boundary Bay Airfield met its initial objective and opened No. 18 Elementary Flight Training School on 10 April 1941.<sup>91</sup> It is clear from the accounts of those close to the base that the events leading up to its official opening on 10 April 1941, and its symbolic one a few months later, that the base had captured the imagination of the Delta Community. The newly built aerodrome attracted great numbers to its unveiling and brought much of the

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<sup>88</sup> *Optimist*, 12 December 1940. Leslie J. Martin played a prominent role in the history of the BCATP in British Columbia. During BCATP training, elementary flight training was provided by civilian run schools before pupils moved on to advanced training. Martin’s companies, the Vancouver Air Training School Company and the Boundary Bay Flying Training Company, managed No. 8 EFTS Sea Island, No. 18 EFTS Delta, and No. 24 EFTS Abbotsford. To his credit, these training stations were often credited as being some of the finest in the country. In one write up on Martin, an anonymous author wrote that “he is on an assembly line and it is producing history.”

<sup>89</sup> *Optimist*, 12 December 1940.

<sup>90</sup> *Optimist*, 23 January 1941.

<sup>91</sup> Daily Diary No. 18 EFTS, 10 April 1941.

community into the fold as a result of the construction that took place. From job creation, land development, editorial interest and the sheer fanfare of hosting a base, the events leading up to the opening of EFTS No. 18 were the prominent theme in Delta's civilian landscape during the early years of the war.

### **The Base in Operation: No. 18 Elementary Flight Training School**

The announcement, construction and opening of No. 18 EFTS marked only the beginning of its influence and legacy for the community of Delta. During its five year history in Delta, the base would operate in a number of different capacities, all of which were focused on contributing to the air war being fought in Europe and the Pacific. Over the course of the war, the airfield's role was a dynamic one. It would serve as an Elementary Flight Training School from 1941-1942, a Home War Aerodrome Unit in response to the attack on Pearl Harbour from 1942-1944, and finally as a bomber training school from 1944 until the end of the war. All three eras will be discussed in the context of the surrounding community, outlining the Station's growth and evolution as it relates to Delta. Station opening and closings, population statistics, airmen-civilian interaction and civilian mobilization will be the focus of the airfield's operational years.

No. 18 Elementary Flight Training School would be charged, like all EFTSs, with providing pilots the initial training they needed before being sent to other specialized schools across the country for advanced training. Under BCATP Organizational Order No. 99, No. 18 EFTS would operate at double the

capacity of a normal EFTS.<sup>92</sup> While the execution of the plan would be under the supervision of a RCAF supervisory officer, the Boundary Bay Flying Training School Ltd would be in charge of both pilot training and day-top-day operations. For Delta residents, this meant additional jobs and opportunities. More specifically, the school would be staffed with local members of the community including clerical staff, accountants, mechanics, maintenance workers and operating staff as well as the instructional staff charged to train the pilots.<sup>93</sup>

Drawing on local communities for staffing was not unique to the Delta School. Indeed, it was one of the reasons that communities lobbied to have a BCATP base. That being said, the Delta base was unique from its counterparts in a notable way. At a dinner held by the base executives, Leslie Martin, President of the Boundary Bay Flying Training School, thanked the girls who had joined the staff of the Boundary Bay School.<sup>94</sup> During its operations, No. 18 EFTS employed nearly fifty women as a result of extreme nature “of the manpower situation.”<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, Martin predicted that his female staff would grow throughout the war, as women took “their place in various parts of the unit as ably and as conscientiously as the men...”<sup>96</sup> That Delta would be one of the first EFTS’s to employ local women came as a surprise to many of them present at the acknowledgement.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Organizational Order No. 99.

<sup>93</sup> Organizational Order No. 99.

<sup>94</sup> *Optimist*, 10 August 1942.

<sup>95</sup> *Optimist*, 10 August 1942.

<sup>96</sup> *Optimist*, 10 August 1942.

<sup>97</sup> *Optimist*, 10 August 1942. While No. 18 EFTS was the first pilot training facility to employ women, the CWAAF had enlisted women one year earlier. See Pierson, *Canadian Women and the Second World War*.

Once the staff of both men and women was in place, the initial projections were to have seventy pupils begin their training immediately.<sup>98</sup> During the operation of No. 18 EFTS, RCAF policy was to train a maximum of 140 pupils per course in elementary flying. A course would take forty-eight days to complete, with an intake of seventy pupils every twenty-four days.<sup>99</sup> This meant that new personnel would be sent into the community on a consistent basis, with the numbers ranging from a low of eighty-two in May of 1941 up to 249 by February of 1942.<sup>100</sup>

From 1941-1942, the sight of RCAF personnel became a common site in Delta. RCAF airmen were given opportunities to socialize with the surrounding community through dances, social evenings, sporting opportunities and general day-to-day business.<sup>101</sup> Despite the presence of these pilots in training, one local historian wrote that aside from uniformed personnel and the sound of their planes above, there “was little in the municipal landscape to indicate that elsewhere in the world a war was in progress.”<sup>102</sup> Delta’s location on the west coast of Canada insulated the community from the effects of the war in Europe. In late 1941, however, the perceived security that Delta enjoyed disappeared overnight following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. Delta, like the entire west coast of North America, was now at risk.

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<sup>98</sup> Organizational Order No. 99.

<sup>99</sup> Organizational Order No. 99 Appendix A: Royal Canadian Air Force Joint Air Training Establishment.

<sup>100</sup> Daily Diary No. 18 EFTS, 28 February 1942.

<sup>101</sup> Daily Diary No. 18 EFTS, Various Dates.

<sup>102</sup> E.W. Taylor, “The Royal Canadian Airforce Station at Boundary Bay BC,” Unpublished essay. Ladner, 1989, 10.

The implications of the attack for Delta and the Boundary Bay Airfield were felt immediately. While No. 18 EFTS continued to train pilots, the airfield would exist in its current capacity for only four more months. In the weeks following the attack Ottawa deemed it necessary, due to the “present emergency,” to close No. 18 EFTS to “make the aerodrome available for Home War Squadrons.”<sup>103</sup> Simply put, given the airfield’s location on the west coast of BC, the Federal Government needed the location to play a defensive role in the war, not an educational one. Officially shut down on 25 May 1942, the base and its personnel were transferred to Caron Saskatchewan.<sup>104</sup>

News of the closure was met with sadness but understanding in the Delta community. The *Optimist* first reported the news in April 1942, expressing regret that the district was losing the school, described as “the most pleasant operation which the municipality had ever had within its boundaries.” It went on to write that it was hoped “that the same fine record would be achieved in the prairies as was accomplished [there]” and that the residents of Caron and Moose Jaw “appreciate the schools as much as [the Delta] district had.”<sup>105</sup> Martin, the manager of the school, extended the community’s thanks to the RCAF and said that the “school ranks among the best elementary training schools in Canada and is outstanding for the efficiency of its operation.”<sup>106</sup>

According to the Daily Diary of the Unit, approximately one thousand students trained at the school over the twelve months it was in operation from

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<sup>103</sup> RCAF Organizational Order No. 191: Relocation of No. 18 Elementary Flight Training School, 1 June 1942.

<sup>104</sup> RCAF Organizational Order No. 200: Disbandment of No. 18 Elementary Flight Training School, 20 June 1942.

<sup>105</sup> *Optimist*, 30 April 1942.

<sup>106</sup> *Optimist*, 30 April 1942.

1941-1942.<sup>107</sup> The base employed numerous civilians, both men and women, and became a prominent fixture in the community. As the base began preparations for its closure, little was written in either the local newspapers or the Daily Diary. One final entry in the Daily Diary outlined Martin's announcement that the school would be closing and offered up brief reports of the number of personnel currently on the base in its final week of operations.<sup>108</sup> Despite the lack of coverage in this transition period, the site would not remain quiet for long. Just as Delta was receiving word of No. 18 EFTS's departure, Ottawa was planning the opening of a Home War Aerodrome (HWA) in the community.

### **The Base in Operation: Home War Aerodrome**

From October 1942 to March 1944 Delta and the Boundary Bay Airport would serve a much different purpose in Canada's military contribution to the war. Between the base's two stints as a BCATP location, the site would serve as a Home War Aerodrome, charged with defending Canada's west coast as a result of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour. Secret Organization Order No. 92 outlined the RCAF's plans for the site, which would come under the authority of Western Air Command.<sup>109</sup> Given the new mandate of the airfield, civilian employment at Boundary Bay came to an end. During the HWA period the Station would run solely as an RCAF operation without the civilian management that had controlled No. 18 EFTS.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Daily Diary No. 18 EFTS, 30 April 1942.

<sup>108</sup> Daily Diary No. 18 EFTS, 30 April 1942.

<sup>109</sup> RCAF Secret Organizational Order No. 92: Formation of RCAF Station, Boundary Bay, B.C., 7 July 1942.

<sup>110</sup> Secret Organizational Order No. 92.

As a HWA, Delta and the Boundary Bay Station were home to No. 132 Fighter Squadron and No. 133 Fighter Squadron. From the community's perspective, the departure from a Training School to a HWA meant a number of changes. Local historian E.W. Taylor wrote that personnel numbers more than tripled during the time, the base grew physically to accommodate the increase, and that the population was more stable and the atmosphere more settled.<sup>111</sup>

During its peak in November 1943 the HWA in Boundary Bay was home to more than 650 men and women who worked on the base.<sup>112</sup> Despite the increase in military personnel during this time, there was a distinct lack of coverage in the local newspapers. As an EFTS the airfield was mentioned frequently in the *Optimist* but for its seventeen month history as a HWA there is a conspicuous lack of coverage about the base, its personnel, or its place in the community.<sup>113</sup> As a result, one must look more closely at the base's Daily Diary for information.

Many of the developments that came as a result of the HWA were related to the activities of the personnel living on and off the base. Those living off the base, usually married men who brought their families from other parts of Canada, found an immediate problem in securing transportation to and from the base.<sup>114</sup> The small rural community had little in the way of public transportation, so for

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<sup>111</sup> Taylor, "The Station at Boundary Bay," 16.

<sup>112</sup> RCAF Daily Diary: RCAF Station, Boundary Bay, B.C., 30 November 1943.

<sup>113</sup> Reporting blackouts were common when activities were relevant to the strategic aspects of the war.

<sup>114</sup> Housing and transportation issues like these were common in major urban centres and small towns during the war, especially those that hosted military bases. See Wade, *Housing for All* and Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers*, 62.

many it was a choice between walking or hitchhiking.<sup>115</sup> For those living in Vancouver there was one bus each day to get to the airfield, although this problem was eventually alleviated when bus service was increased in December 1943.<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, as outlined in the Daily Diary, the most common method of transportation for serviceman was hitchhiking.<sup>117</sup>

While there was much less coverage in the newspaper about the daily events that shaped the HWA period in Delta, one only had to look upward to notice one of the major change. Instead of the familiar site of what one historian called “motorized kites,” (referring to the Kittyhawks) Delta now found itself home to fully mobilized squadrons filled with modern Harvards and Hawker Hurricanes.<sup>118</sup> The differences between the Kittyhawks and the Hurricanes would be unmistakable to even the most uninterested observer, and seeing them train overtop of the community and the surrounding area was an awe inspiring site.

While the pilots training in the Delta skies were no longer students but rather full-fledged pilots, one might expect that number of accidents and crashes to decrease, but this was not the case.<sup>119</sup> During its time as a HWA twenty-two aircraft accidents resulted in four fatalities and two serious injuries.<sup>120</sup> Most interesting to note is that all but five of these crashes occurred within a few miles

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<sup>115</sup> Taylor, “The Station at Boundary Bay,” 17.

<sup>116</sup> Taylor, “The Station at Boundary Bay,” 17.

<sup>117</sup> Daily Diary RCAF Station Boundary Bay, 3 March 1943.

<sup>118</sup> Daily Diary RCAF Station Boundary Bay.

<sup>119</sup> Training accidents were commonplace at both the Boundary Bay and Abbotsford Stations, and were an important element in each community’s relationship with the station. For a discussion on pilot training and competence, notably the quality versus quantity debate, see Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy* and Douglas, *The Creation of a National Air Force*.

<sup>120</sup> Daily Diary RCAF Station Boundary Bay. Accident reports were completed each month.

of the airfield itself, meaning that these planes were coming precariously close to the buildings in town.

Despite the lack of news coverage of the HWA, the public still was still interested in the day-to-day events on the Station. In order to meet this demand, the RCAF published a free weekly paper, in conjunction with the *Optimist*, titled "Take Off." The paper reported on the various happenings of each section of the base, and was written with a very upbeat tone.<sup>121</sup> Published for over thirty weeks during the HWA's time in operation, the demand for such a publication spoke to the interest that the community held in the base. In fact, its early issues were published by the *Optimist* before being taken over by the Station.<sup>122</sup>

### **The Base in Operation: No. 5 Operational Training Unit**

The community of Delta and the Boundary Bay Station would undergo one final transformation as part of its wartime service. As the war developed and Canada's strategic requirements changed, the Boundary Bay Station would revert back to its original purpose as a training facility. No. 5 Operational Training Unit was charged with training pilots and crew in heavy bomber operations. Outlined in Organizational Order No. 331, the unit was opened because "additional facilities were required for training personnel in Heavy Bomber Operational Duties. As the aerodrome and connected buildings are not

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<sup>121</sup> *Take Off: Royal Canadian Air Force, Somewhere on the Pacific*, RCAF: Delta. Various Dates. While entertaining to the reader, the publication was targeted to servicemen and almost insular in nature, doing little to connect the station to the surrounding community.

<sup>122</sup> Taylor, "The Station at Boundary Bay," 18.

required for Western Hemisphere Operations, a Heavy Bomber Operational training unit is to be established at Boundary Bay.”<sup>123</sup> Training was to commence of 24 April 1944 continuing until the Station was permanently closed on 31 October 1945.

The final phase of the Boundary Bay Station was perhaps its most influential when looking at the peak population of both personnel and aircraft and thus the station’s influence on the surrounding community. While No. 18 EFTS was home to anywhere from 80-250 personnel, and the HWA served upwards of 500, No. 5 OTU had a peak population of over 3000, not including members of the auxiliary detachment in Abbotsford.<sup>124</sup> The numbers alone are staggering when one places them in the context of Delta community. Given the population of the municipality in 1941, an influx of 3000 personnel by the summer of 1944 meant a near instantaneous population increase of more than 60 percent.

The massive increase of RCAF and RAF personnel in April 1944 forced the base to grow in order to accommodate the officers and provide adequate training facilities for heavy bomber operations. The overwhelming need for officers with these skills placed new demands on the BCATP and bases were forced to adjust accordingly. For No. 5 OTU in Boundary Bay it meant expanding the base considerably. Within weeks of opening the base as a bomber training school, seventeen additional buildings and structures were planned for and built. These included a maintenance hangar, new quarters, a control tower, bomb

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<sup>123</sup> RCAF Organizational Order No. 331. Formation of No. 5 Operational Training Unit, 17 February 1944.

<sup>124</sup> RCAF Daily Diary No. 5 OTU, Boundary Bay B.C. The population of the unit was 1320 in April 1944 and grew steadily to a peak of 3102 in May 1945.

stores and a mess hall to name just a few. Built with speed and efficiency, these buildings were all completed or nearly completed by the end of April 1944.<sup>125</sup>

As the base evolved in early 1944, Delta citizens got their first glimpse of the heavy bombers being used in Europe. B24 Liberator Bombers were brought in to train the pilots as well as Beechcraft and Dakotas which were used as intermediate training machines.<sup>126</sup> By August 1944 there were 64 aircraft on the base, including 36 Mitchells, 12 Liberators and various Kittyhawks, Bolingbroke and Noesmen. The Mitchell and Liberator aircraft were the primary training aircraft, accounting for over 90 percent of the flying time.<sup>127</sup> New pilots found the larger Mitchells and Liberators difficult to operate, and during the training 25 aircraft were lost, 17 men killed, 7 injured and 12 missing.<sup>128</sup> Fortunately no civilians were harmed as a result of these training accidents, but there was one incident in particular that brought the community of Delta, and much of the lower mainland, precariously close to the action.

Recounting the day's events in the Daily Diary for the base, Commanding Officer D.A.R Bradshaw started with his usual account of the weather, flying activity and daily happenings of the base for Wednesday 6 December 1944. He then went on to write about one Sergeant Scratch who, for five hours,

...almost continuously carried out low-flying manoeuvres and "Beat-Ups" over a considerable portion of the adjacent country-side, including parts of Vancouver. He finally finished with a "Beat-Up" of the Station area causing the Commanding Officer's parade to be cancelled. At

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<sup>125</sup> Daily Diary No. 5 OTU, 30 April 1944.

<sup>126</sup> Daily Diary No. 5 OTU, 30 April 1944.

<sup>127</sup> Daily Diary No. 5 OTU, 15 July 1944.

<sup>128</sup> Daily Diary No. 5 OTU. Monthly Reports.

approximately 0945 he crashed in a field four miles north of the Station, killing himself and completely demolishing the aircraft.<sup>129</sup>

Although described in a typically dry Daily Diary style, for the community of Delta the incident became one of the defining moments of their time as home to a BCATP facility. When speaking with locals who were around at the time, one of their first questions invariably is: “Have you heard about Scratch?”

Local newspapers described the tragic death of Sergeant Donald Palmer Scratch in dramatic terms. “Crazed Airman Amok Over City,”<sup>130</sup> wrote the *Vancouver Sun* while the *Optimist* opened its account by highlighting a “wild ride through the skies over the Lower Mainland...by a student from the Boundary Bay station.”<sup>131</sup>

The event began with Scratch’s attempted theft of a Liberator Bomber from the Boundary Bay airfield. Scratch had in fact attempted a similar stunt in Newfoundland in 1941, only to be demoted in rank.<sup>132</sup> Failing in his attempt to get the massive 4-motor Liberator off the ground, he instead stole a smaller Mitchell Bomber and managed to get airborne. Over the next four and one half hours the pilot performed what witnesses called “impossible manoeuvres”<sup>133</sup> that were equivalent to those “experienced in warfare.”<sup>134</sup> He missed buildings at the Boundary Bay station by only inches, flew between telephone lines, and put the

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<sup>129</sup> Daily Diary No. 5 OTU. 6 December 1944.

<sup>130</sup> *Vancouver Sun*, 6 December 1944.

<sup>131</sup> *Optimist*, 7 December 1944.

<sup>132</sup> *Vancouver Sun*, 6 December 1944.

<sup>133</sup> *Vancouver Sun*, 6 December 1944.

<sup>134</sup> *Optimist*, 28 October 1995.

two-motor bomber through a series of stunts normally reserved for only the most agile fighter planes.<sup>135</sup>

Unable to bring the pilot and his Mitchell aircraft out of the sky, the RCAF sent up fighter pilots in Kittyhawks to try to force him down. Bill Taylor of Tsawwassen told of an associate named “Swede” West, stationed at Boundary Bay, who was one of the men ordered into the Kittyhawks to bring Scratch down. Unable to talk or force Scratch down, he reported to his superiors that “the only way you’ll get this guy down is to shoot him down.”<sup>136</sup> After flying through the skies of the lower mainland for hours, tailed by Kittyhawks, the pursued pilot crashed his stolen Liberator into the middle of an abandoned field on Tilbury Island, about six miles north of the Boundary Bay Station. Witnesses and journalists agreed that Scratch crashed the plane on purpose, arguing that the near vertical crash of the plane, being controlled by such a skilled pilot, must have been intentional.<sup>137</sup> In the end, no damage was done to anything or anyone excluding, of course, the pilot and his stolen plane.

The first question that most people were left asking was why such a clearly skilled pilot chose to steal a plane, take it for a joyride, and then crash it into the middle of a field? According to an interview reported in the *Vancouver Sun*, the airman flew long enough that he could have gone to Winnipeg, but instead chose to circle the skies of the lower mainland. The “cold and cruel” explanation, according to the interview, was that Scratch was crazy.<sup>138</sup> To

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<sup>135</sup> *Vancouver Sun*, 6 December 1944.

<sup>136</sup> *Optimist*, 11 November 1995.

<sup>137</sup> *Vancouver Sun*, 7 December 1944.

<sup>138</sup> *Vancouver Sun*, 7 December 1944.

others, however, this explanation was wholly unsatisfactory. Digging deeper suggested that, while the pilot was of course responsible for his actions, long term inactivity caused the highly skilled pilot to crack.<sup>139</sup> What was originally designed to be an EFTS was now a fully functioning OTU, housing more than three times as many personnel as originally intended, and giving them little to do. Cards and conversation were the main forms of entertainment, with few opportunities to escape the small Delta Community.<sup>140</sup> One columnist, after interviewing members of the No. 5 OTU, reached the following conclusion:

When his gas ran out, when he had laughed, he and death beside him, at the Kittyhawks who chased him, at the tension wires he hopped over, at the airforce men and officers who, he felt, had persecuted him, he turned his nose to the ground and made a 1000 foot dive to death. It was a terrible thing, this man, gleefully crazy in the skies; but one is justified feeling sorry for him. War does things like this to men. The airmen he tantalized at the airport think kindly of him. They admire his flying ability and they know that he deliberately dived to his death and picked a farmyard where nobody else would be hurt.<sup>141</sup>

While there were other casualties at the Boundary Bay Airfield Base during the course of the RCAF's time in Delta, this event was remembered by local residents for many years to come.<sup>142</sup> Those in the buildings he flew over recounted the events as being comparable to being in a warzone. Despite the lack of any damage or casualties to those around the base, the incident terrorized thousands of air force and civilian personnel, bringing lower mainland residents much closer to the war than many would have liked.

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<sup>139</sup> *Vancouver Sun*, 7 December 1944.

<sup>140</sup> *Vancouver Sun*, 8 December 1944.

<sup>141</sup> *Vancouver Sun*, 8 December 1944.

<sup>142</sup> *Optimist*, 28 October 1995.

Fortunately for both Delta and No 5. OTU, the actions of the rogue pilot Sergeant Scratch were not typical of the interactions between airmen and civilians. Recreation and leisure figured prominently in the pages of the Daily Diary of No. 5 OTU, with many of the Commanding Officer's entries documenting the ways in which officers entertained themselves during their time away from flight training.

One of the most common forms of recreation was athletics. The Diary reports participation in basketball, baseball, volleyball, golf, boxing, and to a lesser extent bowling and cricket. While the majority of these sports were played against other trainees, there was some overlap between airfield teams and the community, with some Lacrosse and Basketball games being played against teams from Ladner and Vancouver's Brockton point.<sup>143</sup>

When personnel from the airfield were not busy participating in athletic events, one of the most common pastimes was attending dances held at the Ladner Community Hall, also known as the Dugout. Dances were immensely popular with the Boundary Bay airmen, and the history of these dances provides a unique insight into the relationship between the airfield and the surrounding community. From all accounts, the popularity of these dances reached a peak during the No. 5 OTU era due to the large number of men living in Delta. That being said, the history of these dances, and the Ladner Dugout Committee, can be traced back to 1941 when the community first learned that Delta would host a BCATP school.

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<sup>143</sup> Taylor, "The Station at Boundary Bay," 24.

On 25 March 1941 a small group of Ladner citizens met in the Delta Municipal Hall with the hopes of creating a recreation hut to serve the airmen stationed at the Boundary Bay Station.<sup>144</sup> In subsequent meetings, the group met, appointed officers, applied for funding, and eventually raised enough funds through the War Charities Act to make the facility a reality.<sup>145</sup> They found a location and rented the old King George High School for one dollar per year.<sup>146</sup> To furnish the Dugout the Committee reached out to the community, placing an advertisement in the *Optimist* asking for a kitchen range, a hot water tank, dishes, tables and chairs, card tables, ping pong tables, books and magazines, and a radio.<sup>147</sup> They also received a piano from the United Church and agreed as a Committee to be in charge of keeping the Dugout clean and tidy.<sup>148</sup>

Two and a half months after their first meeting, the Ladner Dugout was officially opened on 2 June 1941. Unable to secure the orchestra from the airfield during the afternoon, they opted for an evening unveiling, with President Patterson complimenting the Committee on “the wonderful charge of the building” and welcomed a large crowd of 240 to the inaugural party. Airmen enjoyed the opening and the complimentary refreshments generously donated by the Coca Cola Company.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Ladner Dugout Committee Fonds, Minute Book, 25 March 1941.

<sup>145</sup> The first elected officers were Mrs. Beatrice Butler (President); Mrs. Perry (First Vice-President); Mrs. Patterson (Second Vice President); Mrs. Eva Muir (Secretary Treasurer); Mr. S.W. Fisher (Board of Governor); Mrs. S. Mowat (Commissary); Mrs. J. Kirkland (House Committee); Mrs. J. Travers (Hostess Committee); Mr. Paterson (Honourable President).

<sup>146</sup> Dugout Minutes, 1 April 1941.

<sup>147</sup> Dugout Minutes, 1 April 1941.

<sup>148</sup> Dugout Minutes, 2 June 1941.

<sup>149</sup> Dugout Minutes, 2 June 1941.

The efforts of the Ladner Dugout Committee are a testament to the community's dedication and support for the newly opened No. 18 EFTS. Not only did the Dugout serve as a recreation centre for those working and training at the airfield, but it was a central meeting point where airmen and civilians, including civilian women, could mingle.

The recreation centre was first mentioned in the *Optimist* on 27 March 1941 under the headline "Recreation Centre Will be Opened in Ladner for Airforce Students"<sup>150</sup> with the opening being well documented under the headline "Capacity Crowd Attends Opening of Ladner Dugout."<sup>151</sup> The newspaper put the total number of attendants at over 400, a splendid turnout given the communities population of approximately five thousand people. To put the number in perspective approximately one out of every twelve residents attended the event. In spite of the unexpectedly large turnout on the opening night, the popularity of the centre would only increase.

As time passed, the efforts of the Ladner Dugout Committee had a profound impact on the community. By 1942, the Committee was appealing to the public for financial assistance as a result of the "increasing numbers of servicemen who [were] using the accommodations provided by the Dugout."<sup>152</sup> The second floor of the former high school was modified to serve as a dance floor, the kitchen was enlarged, two games rooms were renovated, and plans were made to open the Dugout on additional days as a result of the demand by servicemen. To defray the costs the Committee appealed to the public for

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<sup>150</sup> *Optimist*, 27 March 1941.

<sup>151</sup> *Optimist*, 5 June 1942.

<sup>152</sup> *Optimist*, 5 June 1942.

donations, relied on contractors offering discounts, and perhaps most notably, enlisted the servicemen themselves to help renovate the Dugout.<sup>153</sup> As the Dugout continued to grow in popularity, it became one of the focal points of soldier-civilian interaction in Delta. Not only did airmen continue to use the centre in growing numbers, so too did local school girls.

The first hint of public concern came in the 12 November 1942 issue of the *Delta Optimist*. The leading story of day was titled “Problem of School Girls Attending Ladner Dugout Considered by Board.” According to the Delta School Board, high school girls were attending Dugout parties far too often, compromising their studies.<sup>154</sup> According to the Board many of the girls who attend Dugout parties remained out until well past midnight, some of them “falling asleep in class after spending the previous evening as hostesses at the centre.”<sup>155</sup> The Principal of the school, Wilfred Kelly, suggested that the Dugout Committee refuse admission to anyone under the age of eighteen.<sup>156</sup>

After discussing the problem, the Committee agreed that “in the final analysis the responsibility of the matter rests with the parents of high school girls...[and] the school has no legal jurisdiction” to monitor who attends the events. While the Dugout Committee felt that the responsibility did in fact rest with the parents, they decided to have a Committee member meet with the

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<sup>153</sup> *Optimist*, 5 June 1942.

<sup>154</sup> *Optimist*, 12 November 1942.

<sup>155</sup> *Optimist*, 12 November 1942.

<sup>156</sup> The community of Delta was not the only wartime community increasingly worried about youth morality. This was common theme across the country, discussed in detail by Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soliders*, 226. Initiatives like those in Delta were carried out across the country in the hopes of protecting youth morality.

mothers of the girls to discuss age appropriate behaviour, transportation to and from the venue, curfews, and so forth.<sup>157</sup>

With the growth of the base and the continued influx of men, the problem persisted and the Committee was forced, in response the growing popularity of the Dugout, to impose a minimum age of seventeen for both party-goers and hostesses.<sup>158</sup> The Committee was met several times to address the issue while the School Board and local parents saw first-hand just how big a role the Dugout played in the lives of teenage students.<sup>159</sup>

As the Dugout continued to attract more and more people from the community, the next problem became how to control the increasing congestion that resulted from its growing popularity. Not long after the debate over the impact the Dugout was having on the high school girls who frequented it, the centre was soon forced to set limits for the number of people allowed in attendance. While initially designed to provide some recreation to airmen, the Dugout soon found itself hosting events where upwards of 1100 people were in attendance.<sup>160</sup> Soon, the provincial Fire Marshall was forced to intervene, placing a limit of eight hundred people on the venue. While the Marshall found that the building was structurally sound and had the appropriate number of fire escapes, he determined that the congestion from the growing number of attendees represented a distinct fire hazard.

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<sup>157</sup> Dugout Minutes, 10 April 1945.

<sup>158</sup> Dugout Minutes, 10 April 1945.

<sup>159</sup> While the Dugout attracted both young men and young women, it was the influence on women that attracted most of the community's attention. This is consistent with other Canadian communities as conversations about youth morality and promiscuity during the war focused almost exclusively on women. Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 41.

<sup>160</sup> *Optimist*, 17 December 1942.

For its part, the Dugout Committee did its best to accommodate the growing number of people attending the venue. Meeting in January of 1944 they decided to expand the floor-space of the building. While the school board was initially quite skeptical, the Committee succeeded in convincing them and subsequently hired a group of local engineers and tradesmen to complete the job.<sup>161</sup>

In August 1945 the Ladner Dugout Committee met one final time to discuss “the advisability of closing the Dugout” and turning the building over to Delta Branch of the Canadian Legion.<sup>162</sup> With the closure of the Boundary Bay Airfield as an Operational Training Unit, it was clear to the committee that the successful history of the centre had to come to an end. Looking back, there is no denying that this group of men and women, and the centre they facilitated, had a profound role on Delta’s wartime recreation. The Dugout was a consistent topic of conversation in the community as it grew in popularity. Not only did it fully meet its initial objective of providing airmen training at No. 18 EFTS and No. 5 OTU with a place to congregate and relax, it also became a popular destination for civilians as well, hosting large gatherings and parties, sometimes to the dismay of local parents and educators.

When ascertaining the impact of the Boundary Bay Airfield on the community of Delta, one of the most revealing sources is the coverage that certain events receive in the local newspapers. Using this measuring stick, the base’s final event was perhaps its most popular amongst the community. In

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<sup>161</sup> Dugout Minutes, 31 January 1944.

<sup>162</sup> Dugout Minutes, 27 August 1945.

August 1945, the *Optimist* announced that the air training school would be opened to the public, and on display would be one of the Lancaster Bombers used for operations in Europe. Bomber crews that had actually flown the planes in combat would be on hand to answer questions about the aircraft, which had never before been viewed by Canadian civilians.<sup>163</sup> Visitors would also be given the chance to operate a cine-machine gun trainer, designed to recreate combat conditions aboard a bomber using a cinema screen and sound effects. There would also be a bombing trainer, power-operated machine gun turrets and visual displays of all types of weaponry.<sup>164</sup> The airfield created a souvenir programme that was handed out to the guests, which offered “the inside story of the intense preparations and training given operational aircrew at this, the biggest operational training station in Canada.”<sup>165</sup>

It is somewhat fitting that, on the eve of its closure, the BCATP airfield in Delta finally opened itself up to the public. After watching the airfield’s construction and operation for more than four years, community members could finally see the inner-workings of the airport at the same time that victory in the war was being celebrated. Keeping in mind that the community of Delta had a wartime population of a little more than 4,000 people, a staggering crowd estimated at 20,000 showed up to the event.<sup>166</sup> Under the headline “Air Show at Boundary Bay Surpassed All Expectations,” the success of the show was documented. People came from around the community and the lower mainland

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<sup>163</sup> *Optimist* 9 August 1945.

<sup>164</sup> *Optimist* 9 August 1945.

<sup>165</sup> *Admission and Souvenir Program. No. 5 OTU Lancaster Display.* 15 August 1945.

<sup>166</sup> *Optimist* 16 August 1945.

via cars, bicycles, RCAF trucks and of course, walking. The Lancaster proved to be one of the most popular attractions, followed closely by gun turrets made open to the crowd. Of all those who participated, the newspaper reported that perhaps the most “bloodthirsty of all was a small demure miss with pig-tails who was whirring controls of her gun turret in a manner that showed an amazing adaptability in the use of lethal machinery. Maybe the wrong people were shooting the guns...”<sup>167</sup> The numerous displays, games, events, movies, tours and refreshments were all met with great popularity and appreciation by the crowd.

As one columnist wrote, perhaps most important of all was the opportunity presented to Delta residents to “rub shoulders” with men who had returned from Germany only weeks earlier. In many ways the opportunity brought Delta’s wartime experience full circle as residents could see, up close and personal, the pilots and ground crew that No. 18 EFTS and No. 5 OTU had trained over the previous four years. The public was told that nothing would be held back and according to all accounts, nothing was. The “airmen did their stuff and Mr. and Mrs. Public, and all the children, responded with enthusiasm.”<sup>168</sup>

Coinciding with the Air Show was news of Japan’s official surrender, bringing the fighting in World War Two to a close. For one of the first times over the wartime years, battlefield developments were reported in the local paper and VJ Day was celebrated with a front page headline. For the community of Delta, the end of hostilities in August 1945 also meant the inevitable end of its

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<sup>167</sup> *Optimist* 16 August 1945.

<sup>168</sup> *Optimist* 16 August 1945.

relationship with the BCATP. Organizational Order 619 disbanded No. 5 OTU which, “as a result of the successful conclusion of the war in Europe and the war against Japan, [was] no longer necessary.”<sup>169</sup> The order was drafted on 25 August 1945, only ten days after the war ended, and called for the unit to be disbanded effective 31 October 1945.<sup>170</sup>

The *Optimist* covered the official closing of No. 5 OTU in great detail, devoting much of the 1 November issue to the history of the station. The main article traced the history of the base from its construction, official opening by King, the role of women, the schools move to Caron Saskatchewan, its role as a Home War Aerodrome, and finally its unique role as the largest Operational Training Unit in the country.<sup>171</sup> At one minute past midnight on the last day of October the station “went dead” and its days of training young men from across the British Empire were over. The base’s Daily Diary also provided a sombre account of the closing, with base commander J.S. Williamson providing the final entry in what amounted to almost five years of detailed records. He wrote:

Today is “Thirty” for No. 5 Operational Training Unit. Everybody has been struck off strength...Flying has ceased. All aircraft have been flown to Abbotsford for storage. There remains now only to clean up inventories, winterize and lock up buildings as they become vacant, and clear the remaining personnel off station to their new units as their particular job ends. It’s quiet around here, except for the thundering trucks as they haul equipment from barracks and hangars...Soon the peace and quiet of the grave will settle over this once busiest of stations...No. 5 Operational Training Unit officially died at Midnight Tonight.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> RCAF Organizational Order 619: Disbandment of 5 OTU, Boundary Bay, B.C., 25 August 1945.

<sup>170</sup> Organization Order 619.

<sup>171</sup> *Optimist*, 1 November 1945.

<sup>172</sup> Daily Diary No. 5 OTU, 31 October 1945.

The Boundary Bay Station had a lengthy, exciting and complex relationship with the municipality of Delta. It represented the community's most immediate connection to a war being fought in nearly all corners of the globe and brought airmen from across the British Empire to their tiny rural community. It trained these young men in all capacities of aviation and sent them off to make valuable contributions to the air war being fought in Europe and Asia. The Station's conception, construction, evolution and closure were followed step by step in the community newspaper, as the *Optimist* kept the community up to date with the much of what went on at the airfield. It went through three transformations during its existence, from a civilian run Elementary Flight Training School, to a Home War Aerodrome in charge of coastal defence, finally to an Operational Training Unit focused on heavy bomber operations. What started as a small base with an initial graduating class of only a handful of pilots evolved into the largest training facility in the entire BCATP with a peak population of over 3000 personnel.

After examining the BCATP in Delta, there is little doubt that the station had a significant impact on the community its residents. The coverage that the Station received is a testament to the interest the community had in the base, and the interaction between Delta and the Station, between civilian and airmen, shaped the community's entire wartime experience. It brought jobs to local workers, an airfield to a small rural community, airmen from across the globe, civilian and air force pilots, Kittyhawks, Fighter Squadrons and Liberators, raucous parties that concerned local parents, a rogue airman who terrorized the

lower-mainland and lit up the skies, plane crashes, sporting leagues, and a visit from the Prime Minister of the country, all of which amounted to a number of “red letter” days for the community. There is little doubt that the decision to bring No. 18 EFTS to Delta in 1940 was a monumental day in the town’s history, one that had a profound effect on the community and its wartime identity.

## **RCAF Station Abbotsford: Abbotsford and the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan**

On 21 November 1942 a twin engine Cessna Crane touched down on a newly laid runway in the small farming community of Abbotsford British Columbia. There was no staff, buildings or hangars to greet the flight, only civilians working feverishly to complete construction of the first stages of the airport.<sup>173</sup> From this humble first landing there was little indication to the residents of the area that the Abbotsford Airport would soon become RCAF Station Abbotsford, bringing airmen from across the Commonwealth to train first in elementary flight training and then heavy bomber operations. Despite the fact that this initial landing went relatively unnoticed in the community, the BCATP would have a significant impact on Abbotsford residents, with No. 24 EFTS and No. 5 OTU becoming a defining feature in the town's wartime development.

### **The Evolution of an Airfield**

On 28 July 1943, the *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News (ASM News)* reported that the community of Abbotsford was finally chosen to host an Elementary Flight Training School as part of the BCATP.<sup>174</sup> Local MP George Cruickshank fought to have an EFTS in 1941 but the RCAF decided to send EFTS No. 18 to Delta instead. Reporting the news from Ottawa, he was "firmly convinced that our own establishment is equal, both as to site and construction,

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<sup>173</sup> Micheal DesMazes, "Abbotsford Airport Celebrates First Landing," *Abbotsford International Airport News Release*, 16 November 2007.

<sup>174</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 28 July 1943.

of any in the Dominion.”<sup>175</sup> Despite Cruckshank’s recognition of the importance of hosting one of the training schools, there was very little coverage of the event in the local newspaper. The *ASM News* reported on the delayed opening of No. 24 EFTS on 4 August 1943 and on the arrival of H.O. Madden as a flight instructor on 11 August 1943. The only article of any substantial length was the report that Leslie Martin, who ran flight training schools in Vancouver, Sea Island and Delta, and managed No.18 EFTS in Delta, would be the civilian manager of the school.<sup>176</sup>

Other than these brief reports, little was written in the local news prior to the airport’s official opening in September 1943. This is surprising in many regards, most notably because once RCAF personnel arrived and the EFTS opened, it would become one of the most closely followed news stories in the area. Despite the lull in news coverage, the months leading up to the official opening of No. 24 EFTS were busy ones for a community that was given little time to prepare for the influx of RCAF personnel that would soon descend upon the town. The community’s seeming unawareness of the benefits associated with hosting a base did not change the reality of the situation as Abbotsford’s first responsibility, like most other BCATP sites, would be to provide the land, raw materials and labour needed to build an airfield.

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<sup>175</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 28 July 1943.

<sup>176</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 18 August 1943.

Construction of the Abbotsford Airport began on 22 June 1942 and took approximately fifteen months to complete.<sup>177</sup> The construction was fairly typical in that the Department of Transportation followed procedures consistently from airfield to airfield, having built dozens of them in the preceding years. What is unique, however, is that the construction of the Abbotsford Airport was used as a case study for airport construction and documented in the September 1943 issue of the magazine *Roads and Bridges*. Written by Wilfred Braggins, a Senior District Engineer in the Department of Transportation, the ten page article, titled "Canada's Largest Pacific Airport," outlines the techniques used, contracts awarded and challenges faced while building the airport in anticipation of its September 1943 opening.<sup>178</sup>

Although the airport was one of many built across Canada, its size was unique. In addition to the runways, the project would entail forty-four large buildings designed to host a garrison of thousands of men.<sup>179</sup> To accommodate the construction the crews required approximately 403,000 square yards of concrete paving and approximately 1,500,000 cubic yards of grading.<sup>180</sup>

While the technical details of the airport's construction are laid out in detail, a quick summary for the purposes of this investigation will be sufficient. The article outlines the paving, clearing, grading, crushing, screening, fine-grading, inspection, drainage, lighting, water, sewage, roadwork, snow-removal,

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<sup>177</sup> Wilfred Braggins, "Canada's Largest Pacific Airport: Construction Methods Typical of Those Followed During Past Year in Building Large number of Air Bases in British Columbia," in *Roads and Bridges*, September 1943.

<sup>178</sup> Braggins, "Canada's Largest Pacific Airport."

<sup>179</sup> Braggins, "Canada's Largest Pacific Airport," 34.

<sup>180</sup> Braggins, "Canada's Largest Pacific Airport," 34.

seeding and equipment necessary to build the airport. While these details are interesting from an engineering perspective, in trying to understand the impact that the construction had on the community the human element is much more important. Fortunately, Braggins outlines a number of areas where local residents were brought into the fold and played an important role in the building of the airport.

Construction of the runways was done by King Paving Co., an Ontario company responsible for building many of the runways springing up across the country.<sup>181</sup> While the company brought most of its own employees from out east, there were still ample opportunities for Abbotsford and lower mainland residents to get involved. The next largest job was the construction of the forty-four buildings on the base, and this contract was awarded to Northern Construction, located in Vancouver.<sup>182</sup> Other companies employed by the project were Pacific Pipe Co. (wood-stave tank), BC Portland Cement Co. (cement), G&S Eldrige & Co. (inspection), and Clayborn Co. (drainage). Seventy-five General Motors trucks were also rented locally.<sup>183</sup>

Taking the airfield from a barren field to a functional training facility in a little over one year was an impressive feat. In his account of the development of what would become No. 24 EFTS, Braggins underlines a number of factors that made it possible. He points out that there was a great deal of work handed out to local employers, and he concludes his account by writing that completing the work in such a short amount of time would have not been possible had it not

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<sup>181</sup> Braggins, "Canada's Largest Pacific Airport," 36.

<sup>182</sup> Braggins, "Canada's Largest Pacific Airport," 36.

<sup>183</sup> Braggins, "Canada's Largest Pacific Airport," 36-70.

been for the cooperation of contractors and local residents. Due to a labour shortage, the project employed women in various capacities and relied on retired engineers, some of whom were over eighty years of age.<sup>184</sup> Although Braggins does not provide an exact figure for the number of residents employed or the value of the contracts awarded to local employers, there is little doubt that the Department of Transportation and the RCAF relied heavily on Abbotsford for labour and materials.

Despite the size of the undertaking and the impending influx of RCAF personnel into the small town of Abbotsford, the announcement, construction and official opening of No. 24 EFTS passed with very little mention in the community. In fact, when compared to the developments in Delta only a few years earlier there is almost a noticeable absence of coverage in the local newspaper. The excitement and anticipation seen in other communities prior to the opening of an EFTS were nowhere to be found, aside from a few updates regarding dates and personnel. There was little speculation about the prospects for job creation (despite the continued use of Abbotsford companies and labour) and the unofficial opening of No. 24 EFTS on 6 October 1943, marked by a visit from Air Marshall L.S. Breadner, garnered only a fraction of the attention that King's visit had a few years earlier.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Braggins, "Canada's Largest Pacific Airport," 37. The strain that the construction of the Abbotsford airfield placed on the local labour pool was not unique, often precipitating "boom type" conditions. See Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers*, 48-50.

<sup>185</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 6 October 1943.

## **The Base in Operation: No. 24 Elementary Flight Training School**

RCAF Station Abbotsford opened with relatively little fanfare on 6 September 1943.<sup>186</sup> This would mark the beginning of Abbotsford's two year relationship with the BCATP as it would host an EFTS from 1943 to 1944 and an OTU from 1944 to 1945. As was the case with the Boundary Bay Station in Delta, the Airport will be examined to outline its growth and evolution as it relates to the community of Abbotsford. Base openings and closings, population statistics, airmen-civilian interactions and civilian mobilization will be the focus of the airport's operational years as a BCATP site.

First designated Elementary Flight Training School No. 24, the Abbotsford station was mandated with providing would-be pilots with the training they needed before being sent to specialized schools across the country for advanced training. While the base would be under the supervision of an RCAF supervisory officer, actual pilot training would be conducted under the leadership of Leslie Martin and the Vancouver Air Training School.<sup>187</sup> The local newspaper reported that Martin was the only man to organize and operate four different air training schools, and his stellar reputation preceded him as he prepared to operate what would be the largest EFTS in the Commonwealth to date.<sup>188</sup>

Staffing the school for day-to-day operations was one of Martin's first priorities. While pilot training would be conducted by his civilian run training school, there was also a huge demand for both men and women to help operate

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<sup>186</sup> RCAF Organizational Order No. 288. Formation of No. 24 Elementary Flight Training School, Abbotsford BC, 30 July 1943.

<sup>187</sup> Organizational Order No. 288.

<sup>188</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 18 August 1943.

Abbotsford Airport. The *ASM News* chronicled the labour shortage on the front page of their 23 September 1943 edition under the headline “Men, Women May Join RCAF at Abbotsford.”<sup>189</sup> Recruits of all types were urgently needed and applicants who were previously under-qualified because of age or education would now be considered. While the article underscored the demand for men with training as engineers, firemen, shoemakers, pumpmen and telephone men, it also, in a bolded and highlighted section called for “women between 18 and 45 who have at least Gr. 8 education, medically and otherwise fit” to apply and release men for pilot training.<sup>190</sup>

Martin, who was one of the first to employ women at the Boundary Bay Station, continued to utilize them in the operations of the Abbotsford EFTS. Not surprisingly, the employment of local women also led to romantic relationships between airmen and the women. For example, the wedding of Dorothy Mowatt, a parachute packer, and Donaldhy McIntyre, a flying officer, was chronicled in the March 1944 edition of *The Breeze*. While there are no official numbers reported in the Daily Diary or the local newspaper, it is quite reasonable to conclude that Mowatt and McIntyre’s relationship would have been the norm and not the exception.

As the school continued to evolve, it would see a “constant influx of civilian employees” to accommodate the growing needs of the school.<sup>191</sup> With civilian

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<sup>189</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 23 September 1943.

<sup>190</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 23 September 1943. Martin’s use of non-enlisted women to contribute to the war effort was innovative, but not ultimately unique. Non-enlisted women’s contributions to the war are discussed in Gossage, *Greatcoats and Glamour Boots: Canadian Women at War*.

<sup>191</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 21 June 1944.

staff and military personnel, the population of No. 24 EFTS varied from approximately 250 in the opening months to a high of 446 in March 1944,<sup>192</sup> including 156 civilian employees from the surrounding community.<sup>193</sup> These numbers are important for two reasons. First, the population of No. 24 EFTS was comparable to the entire community of Abbotsford at any given point. Second, the employment of local civilians gave a strong boost to the local economy. In addition, there were upwards of two hundred men being trained at any given time, with a new batch arriving every six weeks.<sup>194</sup> With them came new money and energy that would be infused into the Abbotsford community on a continuing basis.

With the base up and running, pilot training was the paramount concern of the RCAF. It was in this area that the community of Abbotsford began to truly embrace its role as part of the war effort. As mentioned earlier, little was written about the construction or early operation of EFTS No. 24. This is surprising for two reasons. First, other EFTSs received heavy coverage in the months and days leading up to their official openings.<sup>195</sup> Second, the *ASM News* followed wartime developments in both Europe and Asia with great frequency and detail. From 1939-1943 front page news often revolved around news from the front, loan campaigns, pictures of local men serving overseas, west coast defence and wartime rationing.<sup>196</sup> Clearly, therefore, the small community of only 562 people

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<sup>192</sup> RCAF Daily Diary No. 24 EFTS, Abbotsford, BC, 31 January 1944.

<sup>193</sup> RCAF Daily Diary No. 24 EFTS, Abbotsford, BC, 31 January 1944.

<sup>194</sup> RCAF Daily Diary No. 24 EFTS, Abbotsford, BC, 31 March 1944.

<sup>195</sup> This was the case in my analysis of Delta and the BCATP. See also: Greenhous and Hillmer, "The Impact of the BCATP."

<sup>196</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 1939-1943.

had an interest in what was happening overseas.<sup>197</sup> It was only once it began graduating pilots, and celebrating its own graduates, that the station began to occupy a more prominent place in the local dialogue.

No. 24 EFTS graduated its first pilots on 26 October 1943, approximately seven weeks after opening. The *ASM News* headline, titled “First Class Graduates From Abbotsford Airport EFTS,”<sup>198</sup> outlined the story of the men, who came from England, Newfoundland and virtually every Canadian province, and underlined the point that many of them were already experienced soldiers who hoped to return to the frontlines. In one eloquent commentary, the author wrote that the community of Abbotsford watched intently as

Youths pilot their training planes back and forth across the sky, sometimes blue, sometimes cloudy, little realizing that among them are men who were dive-bombed at Dunkirk, who escaped the bloody epic of Dieppe, or who went through the Luftwaffe blitz of London calmly going about unscrewing the detonators in Hun bombs that had no yet exploded. Grimly these men have remustered with the determination to get their own back Germans who blasted schools, hospitals and churches...and gave British and Canadian troops no mercy on the beaches of France.<sup>199</sup>

The story also chronicled, with great pride the Fraser Valley men who graduated with the inaugural class, including one Corporeal E.C. McIntyre who remustered from the army.<sup>200</sup>

Community interest in Abbotsford’s EFTS picked up after 27 October 1943 as the airfield began to occupy a much more prominent role in the community.

Despite the employment of local contractors and workers to build and operate the

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<sup>197</sup> BC Stats: British Columbia Municipal Census Population 1921-2006.  
[http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/pop/pop/mun/mun1921\\_2006.asp](http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/pop/pop/mun/mun1921_2006.asp) (21 June 2011)

<sup>198</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 27 October 1943.

<sup>199</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 27 October 1943.

<sup>200</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 27 October 1943.

airport, it was the graduation of remustered wartime veterans and Fraser Valley residents that truly captured the imagination of the town. This fascination with home grown pilots continued two weeks later when Abbotsford teacher Victor Hansen grabbed the front page of the news when he was awarded top marks in his class, earning his elementary wings with seventeen other BC residents.<sup>201</sup> As coverage of the graduating classes from No. 24 EFTS increased, so too did the community's involvement in the ceremonies. The 26 November 1943 ceremony drew a large crowd of spectators from Abbotsford and Matsqui who turned out to recognize the graduating class and a man from Lima, Peru, who took top honours.<sup>202</sup>

By the beginning of 1944, it is clear that community interest in No. 24 EFTS was growing. Not only did the 26 January 1944 edition of the *ASM News* cover the sixteen BC residents who graduated from the EFTS, it also devoted the front page to a political cartoon that playfully satirized six of the more prominent personalities at the school.<sup>203</sup> The cartoon, submitted by a member of the graduating class Peter Seabourne, depicted the Manager Stewart McKercher, Chief Flight Instructor Morley Gain and four other popular members of the class. A third article described the opening of a new base headquarters. The building, according to base RCAF staff, would make the base "as efficient as it [was] good looking" and would mean that "No. 24 EFTS could match any school in Canada."<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 10 November 1943.

<sup>202</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 1 December 1943.

<sup>203</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 26 January 1944.

<sup>204</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 26 January 1944.

At this point, coverage of the base had grown from sparse accounts, to detailed records of graduating classes, to multi-article newspaper editions devoted to all aspects of No. 24 EFTS. In the months that followed the community would continue to follow the graduating classes with close interest. On 22 February 1944, more Abbotsford and Matsqui men graduated from No. 24 EFTS<sup>205</sup> and on 1 March 1944 a large graduating ceremony was covered with a pictorial account on the front page of the newspapers.<sup>206</sup> A similar story, written the following week, highlighted F.O. Francis, who was awarded the operational golden wing by Air Vice Marshall G.R. Howsam in the familiar hollow square ceremony.<sup>207</sup>

When personnel from the airfield were not busy honing their flying skills, a popular recreation site was the Servicemen's Social Centre in Abbotsford, built by the Matsqui-Sumas-Abbotsford Citizens' Committee.<sup>208</sup> The Hut, as it became known, first opened in October 1943, shortly after flight training began at the airport. Over the following months the popularity of the facility grew, attracted nearly 3000 servicemen and guests from the community.<sup>209</sup> When placed in the context of the small farming community of Abbotsford, these numbers are quite remarkable. In all accounts the Hut was a great success, comparing "very favourably with all and better than most others," with all events well patronized by

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<sup>205</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 23 February 1944.

<sup>206</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 1 March 1944.

<sup>207</sup> *ASM News, Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 8 March 1944. The hollow square refers to the configuration of graduates who gather on the runway to receive their elementary wings.

<sup>208</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 16 February 1944.

<sup>209</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 16 February 1944.

servicemen and guests.<sup>210</sup> In the No. 24 EFTS weekly publication *The Breeze*, servicemen went out of their way to praise the efforts of the Abbotsford community to provide them with such wonderful place to relax, as the Hut “crystalized” the already “warm feelings” that airmen had towards residents of Abbotsford.<sup>211</sup> Clearly the efforts of Abbotsford citizens had not gone unnoticed. They spent a great deal of time and energy and “banded together to meet the need of men in service for a place to go and place to play”<sup>212</sup> and their efforts went a long way to bring together members of the community and the school.

Following the successful track record of the Hut, it was announced on 8 March 1944 that a large recreation centre would be opened at the EFTS.<sup>213</sup> Known as the Town Hall, the opening of this recreation centre was important for the community of Abbotsford for a number of reasons. First, the giant hall would be built by local carpenters and tradesmen, and it would be operated by a civilian staff of female employees.<sup>214</sup> They would be charged with operating the hall itself as well as a library, chapel, games room, rifle range and a host of offices. In addition to employing a number of community members, the giant building, built to be as big as an aircraft hangar, would be open to the public.<sup>215</sup> The

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<sup>210</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 16 February 1944.

<sup>211</sup> *The Breeze: Weekly Publication for Personnel of No. 24 EFTS Abbotsford BC*, RCAF: Abbotsford, 22 December 1943. Unlike the Delta station’s publication *Take Off*, *The Breeze* provided a number of important insights into the relationship between the station and the community.

<sup>212</sup> *The Breeze*, 22 December 1943.

<sup>213</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 8 March 1944.

<sup>214</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 8 March 1944. *EFTS No. 24 Yearbook*, RCAF: Abbotsford, 1944.

<sup>215</sup> *The Breeze*, 10 March 1944.

yearbook of No. 24 EFTS also praised the Town Hall as a place where the entire town could truly get together, as dances remained a highlight for servicemen.<sup>216</sup>

The size and popularity of the Hall are remarkable when looking at the number of people, both servicemen and civilians, who attended certain events. For example, a Navy Show in March 1944 attracted over 1500 people.<sup>217</sup> This meant that if every man, woman and child from both the base and the town were in attendance, they would still only make up two-thirds of this figure. The Town Hall was clearly popular to those outside the base and town as well, bringing in people from across the region.

In addition to dances and social gatherings, athletics were also an important part of morale for servicemen and women stationed at No. 24 EFTS. The Town Hall met this need and offered opportunities for men and women to play in nearly any sport of their choosing. Participation in these sports was not limited, however, to servicemen. Civilian teams joined recreational and competitive leagues and competed alongside and against servicemen.<sup>218</sup> As was the case with dances and social evenings, sports brought community members and base personnel closer than ever, as teams from the respective groups played against one another in basketball, fastball, badminton and volleyball.<sup>219</sup>

Basketball seemed to be the most popular of the sports as it was covered closely in *The Breeze*, which documented many close battles between the

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<sup>216</sup> *EFTS No. 24 Yearbook*, RCAF: Abbotsford, 1944.

<sup>217</sup> *The Breeze*, October 1943.

<sup>218</sup> *EFTS No. 24 Yearbook*, RCAF: Abbotsford, 1944.

<sup>219</sup> *EFTS No. 24 Yearbook*, RCAF: Abbotsford, 1944.

teams. In fact, the station's first game of any type was a basketball game against the local team.<sup>220</sup> Perhaps not boding well for the station team, the article called for all men who were "adept at flinging a ball through a hoop" to attend. As time passed the station improved, winning its share of games played. One of the most closely followed, however, was a three point loss by the No. 24 EFTS men in the semifinals of the league championship in March 1944.<sup>221</sup> While there was clearly fierce competition between the teams, the article also conveyed a clear sense of comradery between the two groups, complementing the "home-town lads" with their prowess from behind the 3-point line.<sup>222</sup>

The Servicemen's Social Club, the Town Hall and athletics programs all played an important role in bringing together servicemen and community members. That they were opened to guest and community members is evidence of the fact that there was a great deal of socializing between servicemen and citizens, as was the case in Delta with the success of the Dugout. Furthermore, the Town Hall brought a number of events to the small town which community members might otherwise have missed out in. Huge radio and navy shows were scheduled as was a touring group known as "Meet the Navy."<sup>223</sup> In addition, special holiday celebrations like the Christmas party held at the Hut solidified an already positive relationship between most residents and base personnel.

The construction of the Town Hall in 1944 was one of many developments around the Abbotsford Airport. As time passed, the airfield and its facilities

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<sup>220</sup> *The Breeze*, 17 March 1944.

<sup>221</sup> *The Breeze*, 10 March 1944.

<sup>222</sup> *The Breeze*, 10 March 1944.

<sup>223</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 8 March 1944.

continued to grow physically to accommodate the growing demand of the BCATP. Buildings routinely sprung up on the station and many received upgrades and renovations. Interestingly, the goal of the Vancouver Air Training Company was to make the EFTS not only a functional training facility, but also one of the best looking.<sup>224</sup> In April 1944 the company took over the fulltime maintenance of the land and buildings in addition to running the pilot training programs. Under the civilian-RCAF plan of EFTS organization, “the operating company took over responsibility and maintenance of grounds and buildings of [the] RCAF station for the duration of its contract...”<sup>225</sup> When construction was completed the Vancouver Air Training Company continued to make aesthetic improvements to the grounds, providing landscaping, shrubbery, and tennis courts. In the end, the efforts of the civilians who worked on the base made No. 24 EFTS one of the best in the country, drawing praise from legion officers and BCATP officials following a visit in June 1944.<sup>226</sup> This assessment was echoed by the Governor-General of Canada, the Earl of Athlone, who visited the EFTS in the summer of 1944, the only school he visited during his west coast tour that year.<sup>227</sup>

Abbotsford citizens now closely followed developments of the Abbotsford Airport and No. 24 EFTS. While accounts pointed to a positive relationship between the servicemen and the community, one area of concern were the number of inexperienced airmen training overhead. From the public’s standpoint

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<sup>224</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 5 April 1944.

<sup>225</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 19 April 1944.

<sup>226</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 7 June 1944.

<sup>227</sup> *The Breeze*, 23 May 1944.

the safety record of the school remained a paramount concern.<sup>228</sup> That being said, the safety record of No. 24 EFTS was substantially better than its predecessor in Boundary Bay. In the first eight months of training, there was only one major accident at the school, resulting in a single fatality.<sup>229</sup> After hearing about the training accidents at other EFTSs, the people of Abbotsford felt “naturally apprehensive” about having pilots train above their community but the safety record of the school put the vast majority of them at ease.<sup>230</sup>

As No. 24 EFTS reached the peak of its training, it solidified its relationship with the surrounding community. Not only were citizens pleased with the school’s safety record, but this,

with the fine morale, the enthusiasm of the graduating pupils, the interest not only of the citizens of the immediate area of Matsqui, Sumas and Abbotsford in the students, but of neighboring districts such as Langley, Mission and even Lynden, Washington, all must add to a feeling of justifiable pride and satisfaction to the [CO] of No. 24 EFTS.<sup>231</sup>

This positive review of the actions of No. 24 EFTS could only have been enhanced by a two subsequent stories in the *ASM Times*. On 17 May 1944 it was reported that the Vancouver Air Training School Company, which was entitled to keep twenty-percent of the profits that came with operating the school, was going to return all of the profits to the Crown.<sup>232</sup> Forgoing any profit painted the school in an even more favourable light in the community’s eyes, especially after an earlier story reported that employees and management decided to

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<sup>228</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 26 April 1944.

<sup>229</sup> RCAF Daily Diary No. 24 EFTS, accident statistics.

<sup>230</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 26 April 1944.

<sup>231</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 26 April 1944.

<sup>232</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 17 May 1944.

donate a full day's pay to the 1944 war fund in response to an appeal from the Red Cross.<sup>233</sup>

No. 24 EFTS's success as a pilot training facility and its positive relationship with the community of Abbotsford could not save the base from closing a little less than one year after it opened. The base received official word on 15 June 1944, reporting that Course 106 would be its last, culminating on 14 July 1944.<sup>234</sup> Closure of the training school did not mark the end of Abbotsford's relationship with the BCATP, however, as the EFTS would be replaced by heavy bombers and an Operational Training Unit. While news of the base opening went relatively unnoticed in 1943, the story occupied the front page of the *ASM News* for a number of weeks leading up to its official transition to an OTU on 15 August 1944. Articles praised the base for its safety record in the community, its employment of civilian, its entertainment facilities (for both servicemen and Abbotsford residents), and its reputation as one of the most progressive EFTSs in the country.<sup>235</sup>

### **The Base in Operation: No. 5 Operational Training Unit (Abbotsford Detachment)**

The community of Abbotsford would have little time to lament the closing of its pilot training school. Effective 15 August 1944, No. 5 OTU: Abbotsford Detachment was to begin operations at the Abbotsford Airport. This transition

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<sup>233</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 8 March 1944.

<sup>234</sup> RCAF Daily Diary No. 24 EFTS, Abbotsford, BC, 15 June 1944. RCAF Organization Order 373: Disbandment of No. 24 EFTS Abbotsford, 15 June 1944.

<sup>235</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 21 June 1944.

was a result of “strategic changes in the war” which made it necessary to expand No. 5 OTU: Boundary Bay to the Abbotsford Aerodrome.<sup>236</sup> Boundary Bay was unable to meet the demand of the BCATP on its own and it was decided that five additional bomber crews would be trained simultaneously in Abbotsford.<sup>237</sup>

The Abbotsford Airport would serve as a detachment of the Boundary Bay Airport from 15 August 1944 to 31 August 1945. From the community’s perspective, however, the base would be a detachment in name only. With its new mandate the Abbotsford Airport continued to expand its physical characteristics as well as its impact on the community. At its peak, No. 5 OTU Abbotsford Detachment would house and train over 1,400 flight personnel, further expand the physical dimensions of the airport, bear witness to three horrific training accidents and occupy a central role in Abbotsford’s wartime community.

The final phase of Abbotsford’s relationship with the BCATP meant another significant influx of flight personnel and aircraft. After August 1944, the base was home to well over one thousand servicemen and women each month, with its peak population of 1405 in January 1945,<sup>238</sup> including 121 civilian employees and 315 RAF and Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) officers.<sup>239</sup> One need not stretch their imagination to realize the immense impact that this

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<sup>236</sup> RCAF Organizational Order No. 378. Formation of No. 5 OTU Operational Training Unit, Abbotsford Detachment, 15 June 1944. As the Allies took control of the air war in Europe, the demand for fighter pilots gave way to the need for heavy bomber pilots and aircrew.

<sup>237</sup> Organization Order No. 378.

<sup>238</sup> RCAF Daily Diary No. 5 OTU: Abbotsford Detachment, 31 January 1945.

<sup>239</sup> Daily Diary No. 5 OTU: Abbotsford, 31 January 1945.

nearly instantaneous population increase placed a strain on the local housing market, shops, services and cafes in a town of under 600 people.<sup>240</sup>

The overnight transition from an EFTS to an OTU meant a rapid change for both the base and the community. In order to meet the new demands local MP George Cruickshank reported that \$560,000 would be spent on airport upgrades.<sup>241</sup> Cruickshank was extremely pleased with the development, commenting that it was:

...gratifying to know that this work will shortly be undertaken...it will give a lot of employment during the slack season and add a great deal to the value of the present magnificent airport as an eventual peace time port available for the entire Fraser Valley, Vancouver and New Westminster, suitable for use year round.<sup>242</sup>

Even with the required upgrades and additional funding, the Commanding Officer of the Abbotsford detachment wrote that No. 5 OTU “got off to a flying start for practically everything was in readiness from No. 24 EFTS” and its civilian run program.<sup>243</sup> Not only was the BCATP site continuing to impact the community of Abbotsford, but locals were already identifying the important role it was likely to play in the future of the town.

As the base began training bomber pilots in Liberator aircraft, some in the community wondered whether the training program was necessary, given the fact that men being trained at the OTU had already earned their wings at other bases.<sup>244</sup> Responding, the local newspaper wrote at length about the new challenges facing those training on the massive Liberator Aircraft. In fact,

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<sup>240</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 29 August 1945.

<sup>241</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 25 October 1944

<sup>242</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 25 October 1944.

<sup>243</sup> McFarlene, W.D., *No 5 OTU Abbotsford BC*, RCAF: Abbotsford, 1945.

<sup>244</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 4 April 1945.

students went through two rounds of training, first honing their skills on Mitchells in Boundary Bay and then graduating to the Liberators in Abbotsford.<sup>245</sup> Despite this progression in their training, the challenges facing airmen learning to fly these heavy bombers remained daunting. Accident records in the Daily Diary of the detachment support this fact, as Abbotsford would bear witness to 44 accidents resulting in 20 men killed and 9 injured.<sup>246</sup> When Abbotsford was an EFTS the *ASM News* underlined the fact that one of the prominent civilian concerns with hosting a base was the dangers associated with aircraft accidents. Unfortunately, the community would bear witness to far more accidents as an OTU, a number of which were especially alarming for Abbotsford residents.<sup>247</sup>

One of the largest accidents was the 4 February 1945 crash of Liberator EW134, killing all seven men aboard.<sup>248</sup> While no civilians were harmed in the crash, it was the first time that the community's earlier apprehension about hosting a pilot training school appeared to be justified. The story of this crash did not end, however, in 1945 as local historian Micheal DesMazes continues to investigate the crash.<sup>249</sup> While the RCAF concluded that it was pilot error because the pilot "attempted to bank the aircraft to port on an unoperative outer engine," DesMazes points out that local residents who witnessed the crash said that the aircraft did not sound right and that one of the props was not working

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<sup>245</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 4 April 1945.

<sup>246</sup> Daily Diary No. 5 OTU: Abbotsford, Monthly Reports.

<sup>247</sup> See Douglas, *The Creation of a National Air Force* and his discussion of training programs and procedures for the challenges behind heavy bomber training.

<sup>248</sup> Daily Diary No. 5 OTU: Abbotsford, 4 February 1945.

<sup>249</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 4 February 2000.

correctly.<sup>250</sup> If the pilot was either unaware or uninformed about the malfunctioning prop, the RCAF conclusion may not be entirely accurate. Whatever the final outcome of DesMazes' investigation may be, the crash continues to be a topic of conversation in local news even to this day.

A second accident on 3 July 1945 was also covered in great detail by not only the *ASM News* but also the *Vancouver Daily Province* and the *Vancouver Sun*. The accident occurred when two Liberators, being taxied in opposite directions on the runway, collided, setting fire, igniting ammunition, killing nine and injuring six.<sup>251</sup> *The Daily Province* led with the opening line "nine die in a hell of an explosion and fire at Abbotsford RCAF station" while the *ASM News* passed on an eye witness account that saw flames spiralling 200 feet into the air which painted the sky blood red.<sup>252</sup> As was the case with the Liberator crash in February 1945, the accident on the runway of the Abbotsford airport continues to occupy place in the community's memory as it represented "one of the worst wartime tragedies to occur" in Abbotsford.<sup>253</sup> A 1998 article commemorates the accident as part of a Remembrance Day tribute, quoting Wing Commander Blackie William's recollection that it was "just another of those terrible accidents that happen during an error in judgement."<sup>254</sup>

While these accidents and the forty-two others that occurred at the No. 5 OTU Abbotsford marked the most sombre part of the town's relationship with the training school, they were certainly not reflective of the overall sentiment between

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<sup>250</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 4 February 2000.

<sup>251</sup> Daily Diary No. 5 OTU: Abbotsford, 3 July 1945.

<sup>252</sup> *Vancouver Daily Province*, 4 July 1945 and *ASM News*, 4 July 1945.

<sup>253</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 10 November 1998.

<sup>254</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 10 November 1998.

base personnel and community members. Developments in Abbotsford mirrored, in many ways, those in Boundary Bay. Local residents interacted with servicemen and women in a variety of ways, including everything from athletics to parties to everyday errands.

As was the case with No. 24 EFTS, one of the most common forms of recreation was athletics. Daily Diary entries of No. 5 OTU Abbotsford were often concluded with a report of the scores from local basketball league, where both station and civilian teams participated.<sup>255</sup> Frequent dances and social gatherings at the Town Hall brought together servicemen and members of the community, who were often entertained by live music and entertainers.<sup>256</sup> The Town Hall and the Hut, both popular destinations by members of the EFTS, continued to entertain both station personnel and Abbotsford residents from 1944-1945.

Opportunities for organized socializing allowed residents to interact with station personnel who had come from across the Commonwealth to train in Abbotsford, but the arrival of some 1400 airmen also strained the tiny community. RCAF training also meant an increased demand for housing in the area, which created a significant strain on local renters.<sup>257</sup> Airmen also frequented local shops and cafes in the community which provided increased revenue<sup>258</sup> for local businesses. Finally, there is also some anecdotal evidence of the impact that the station had on the community as well. Of the more than one thousand men who served in Abbotsford at any given time, more than three hundred were typically

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<sup>255</sup> Daily Diary No. 5 OTU: Abbotsford, 12 October 1944.

<sup>256</sup> Daily Diary No. 5 OTU: Abbotsford, 16 November 1944, 19 November 1944.

<sup>257</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 29 August 1945. These findings are similar to those of the Boundary Bay Station. See also: Wade, *Housing for All* and Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Solidiers*, 77.

<sup>258</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 29 August 1945.

members of the RAF, which brought a noticeable accent and a new set of slang and mannerisms to the small town.<sup>259</sup> From the evidence presented in both the local newspaper and the Daily Diary, these interactions proved to be amicable as there is no mention in either source of problems between servicemen and residents.

When analyzing the impact of RCAF operations on the community of Abbotsford, one of the most accurate types of measurement is often the local newspaper. There is a direct correlation between an event's influence and the coverage it received in the *ASM News*. Not surprisingly, accidents and large expenditures of money received front page coverage, whereas local dances and similar events were usually relegated to the interior pages. Given this pattern, the base's most popular event was the 8 August 1945 open house, which gave people from across the Fraser Valley the opportunity to experience a fully functional wartime Operation Training Unit.<sup>260</sup>

Details of the event were covered in the 15 August 1945 edition of the *ASM News*. More than twelve thousand people of all ages, from all parts of the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley flocked to the event.<sup>261</sup> Three thousand cars overflowed makeshift parking lots and lined the highway for more than a mile in both directions. One of the most popular attractions were the many types of planes on display, as visitors were able to get a close look at Liberators, Lancasters, Mosquitos, Kitty Hawks, Mitchells and transport planes.<sup>262</sup> A large

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<sup>259</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 29 August 1945.

<sup>260</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 8 August 1945.

<sup>261</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 15 August 1945.

<sup>262</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 15 August 1945.

proportion of the visitors also stayed for the evening dance and refreshments, but the most popular events proved to be the sports card, as a huge following cheered their local airmen to victory over army and navy teams in a battery of athletic events.<sup>263</sup> The culminating event of the open house was the crowning of the “Queen of OTU Detachment” Mary Johnson, a clerk-stenographer at the station.<sup>264</sup>

The Abbotsford Airport open house was from all accounts a huge success, thrilling the thousands in attendance who were given the opportunity to inspect “every nook and hangar” on the station.<sup>265</sup> The final tally concluded that more than 15,000 Fraser Valley residents attended the event, a huge number when contrasted with the population on the town. The success of the event further demonstrates the important role that the station played in the town’s wartime identity. Abbotsford and Fraser Valley residents clearly had a great deal of interest in the base and jumped at the opportunity to interact with the servicemen who operated it. The open house brought Abbotsford’s experience as a BCATP site full circle as it was able to see the end result of their three year relationship with the airport.

Coinciding with coverage of the open house was a dramatic headline announcing that the war was over. Under the headline read: “PEACE...Victory is Ours,” the *ASM News* documented the jubilant celebration that took place, rejoicing in what it called a “long awaited V-Day” announcement.<sup>266</sup> As was the

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<sup>263</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 15 August 1945.

<sup>264</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 15 August 1945.

<sup>265</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 22 August 1945.

<sup>266</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 15 August 1945.

case for many training sites across the country, the end of fighting also meant the end of Abbotsford's relationship with the BCATP. Organization Order 620 disbanded No. 5 OTU Detachment "as a result of the successful conclusion of the war in Europe and the war in Japan..." Continued operation of the unit was no longer necessary, and it would cease to function effective 31 August 1945.<sup>267</sup> The order was drafted only ten days after the war ended, and the community would go from enjoying the experience of touring a wartime Operational Training Unit to documenting its closure.

"Liberators Leave Skies Over Area" gave a final account of the relationship and history of British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in Abbotsford.<sup>268</sup> Published only two days before the station's official close, the story traced the construction of the airfield in 1942, its role as a civilian-run Elementary Flight Training School and its final capacity as an OTU where men from Canada, Britain and New Zealand came to fly the four-engine Liberators.<sup>269</sup> It commented on the already quiet skies above the town and questioned the impact of the base's closure, hoping that returning servicemen would take up the slack left by the departing airmen.<sup>270</sup> Once accepted as commonplace, the sounds of Liberators above and English accents in local shops and cafes were quickly vanishing from the small Fraser Valley community. On a positive note, it was hoped that the departure of station personnel would ease the housing situation, which had been strained throughout the war.

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<sup>267</sup> RCAF Organizational Order 620: Disbandment of 5 OTU Detachment, Abbotsford, B.C., 25 August 1945.

<sup>268</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 29 August 1945.

<sup>269</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 29 August 1945.

<sup>270</sup> *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*, 29 August 1945.

The BCATP played a prominent role in the wartime identity of Abbotsford BC. This small farming community followed the first three years of the war with great interest, documenting the successes of their own homegrown soldiers, Loan Campaigns, frontline advancements, food rationing and west coast defence. The opening of No. 24 EFTS on 6 September 1943 brought an entirely new dynamic to the community's interest in the war. Local newspapers now split headlines between news from Europe and Asia with developments in their own backyard, closely following the graduation of elementary pilots and the advanced training of heavy bomber pilots. Personnel strength of the station was double that of the surrounding community and there were, at some points, as many Englishmen in the streets of Abbotsford as there were Canadians.

There is little doubt that the BCATP exerted a considerable influence on the community of Abbotsford. Newspaper articles, RCAF publications, Daily Diaries and third party accounts all point to a close relationship between Abbotsford residents and the station. The community followed the graduation of elementary pilots in great detail and celebrated when a local resident was one of them. Residents attended station dances and social gatherings with great regularity and built a recreation centre to host these events. Despite a number of headline grabbing accidents at the base, all records indicate a positive relationship between the station and the community as the base brought jobs to local workers, stimulated the local economy and allowed residents to rub shoulders with the men that they once related to only by reading the local newspaper.

## Post-War Legacy

The impact and influence of the BCATP on Delta and Abbotsford during the war years represents only part of its legacy in these communities. When the war ended, the mandate of both stations changed almost immediately, ending pilot and aircrew training. Rearguards were left behind, as was some of the equipment, but base populations decreased dramatically as did the number of planes in the sky. While these developments were met with a sombre tone in the towns, both continued to be strongly influenced by their experience as BCATP sites. The full legacy of the BCATP in Delta and Abbotsford is a long and detailed story, one that continues to this day. While this research focused primarily on the immediate impact of the aerodromes during the war years, it is worthwhile to draw attention to some of the developments since 1945 to further underscore the significance of these aerodromes.

First, there was a significant human impact that came as a result of the BCATP sites. Many airmen who trained in Boundary Bay and Abbotsford returned to the communities after the war. Steve Riddell, a flying officer at the Boundary Bay Station, did not return to his hometown in Manitoba after the war, instead opting to take up residence in Delta. He was a skilled electrician who opened up his own company on Boundary Bay Road, transferring his skills from Spitfires and radios to household appliances and lighting.<sup>271</sup> Ken Tancock was

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<sup>271</sup> *The Optimist*, 13 December 1945.

another serviceman who opened a business in Delta after the war, providing locals with fresh meat and fish from his butcher shop.<sup>272</sup>

A significant number of BCATP trainees met local women during their training and returned after the war to get married and start a family. Other relationships saw Canadian women leave the country to live in England, Australia or New Zealand. While there are no statistics immediately available on the BC stations, a final report from the BCATP Supervisory Board calculated that “more than 3,750 members of the RAF, RAAF, RNZAF and Allied nationals under RAF quotas married Canadian girls.”<sup>273</sup> The experience of Dorothy Mowatt of Abbotsford, mentioned earlier, is one example of these relationships.

The movement of men and women into and out of Delta and Abbotsford as a result of the BCATP was typical in many of the bases across the country.<sup>274</sup> While this postwar migration should not be underestimated, it is only one facet of the BCATP legacy. As early as 1944, Abbotsford MP George Cruickshank identified the potential future gains that the newly built airport might offer. The immediate benefits of labour were important for his constituents, but the infrastructure left behind would “add a great deal of value...as an eventual peace time port available for the entire Fraser Valley...”<sup>275</sup> It is in this capacity that the legacy of the BCATP in British Columbia can perhaps best be measured. Both airports continue to operate to this day, occupying an important role in the identities and economies of their respective cities.

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<sup>272</sup> *The Optimist*, 13 December 1945.

<sup>273</sup> Supervisory Board of the BCATP, *Final Report*, 16 April 1945, as quoted in Greenhous and Hillmer, “The Impact of the BCATP,” 144.

<sup>274</sup> Greenhous and Hillmer, “The Impact of the BCATP,” 141-142.

<sup>275</sup> *ASM News*, 25 October 1944.

In Delta, the Boundary Bay Airport is constantly abuzz with flights coming and going. While it is not an international airport, it provides an important service for the local transportation of people, goods and services. That being said, even the most ardent air traveller would likely be surprised to learn that Boundary Bay Airport moves more aircraft than the vast majority of Canada's larger, more well-known airports. In fact, in 2009 Boundary Bay Airport ranked ninth on a list of Canada's busiest airports based upon aircraft movement, placing it ahead of international airports in Winnipeg, Edmonton, Quebec City and Regina to name just a few.<sup>276</sup> The small municipal airport finds itself in the same league as international airports located in Ottawa and Montreal as it moved 143,736 aircraft according to Transport Canada's Air Movement statistics.<sup>277</sup> The unmistakable triangular runways built more than seventy years ago continue to serve as an important aviation hub for the lower mainland economy.

About an hour drive east of the Boundary Bay Airport is the Abbotsford Airport. Today, the Abbotsford International Airport represents one of the cornerstones of the community's current economic landscape. Seventy years ago, however, the site of the airport was nothing more than undeveloped farmland. The 1942 landing of a twin-engine Cessna Crane was the first of countless flights to arrive in Abbotsford.<sup>278</sup> From this first humble landing, the airport has evolved significantly over the past seventy years, celebrating its first international flight in December 2002.

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<sup>276</sup> Statistics Canada. "Total Aircraft Movement by Class of Operation – NAV Canada Towers." <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/51-209-x/2011001/t002-eng.htm> (6 June 2011).

<sup>277</sup> Statistics Canada. "Total Aircraft Movement by Class." (6 June 2011).

<sup>278</sup> DesMazes, Micheal, "Abbotsford Airport Celebrates First Landing," *Abbotsford International Airport News Release*, 16 November 2007.

The flight was front page news in the city's newspaper, lauded as a monumental development in the community and airport's history.<sup>279</sup> Located three kilometers from the centre of town, the airport is a "rapidly growing full-service, all weather international airport, that accommodates charter airline passenger service, aerospace manufacturing and maintenance, commercial, private and government flight operations and a full complement of aviation support services and facilities." It prides itself on being "Vancouver's hassle free alternative."<sup>280</sup> Approximately 400,000 people use the airport annually and the number is increasing each year, with an estimated 2.5 million people expected to use the terminal in the next fifteen years.<sup>281</sup>

The significance of the airport's history is not lost on those closest to it. As part of the celebration for its first international flight, Dave Kandal, Chair of the Abbotsford Airport Authority, outlined the importance of remembering where the airport came from:

It is important to remember our history and where Abbotsford International began. The first landing was the start of something big for our community. From training future fighter pilots to servicing the travel of more than half a million passengers a year our little airstrip has grown up to become a regional player in the provincial [and now international] transportation network.<sup>282</sup>

Both Delta and Abbotsford continue to feel the effects of the BCATP to this day. A 2001 special addition of the *Canadian Civil Engineer* acknowledged the vast contribution and impact that the BCATP had on many Canadian

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<sup>279</sup> *The Abbotsford News*, 2 December 2002.

<sup>280</sup> "Transportation: Abbotsford International Airport," *Abbotsford Economic Profile*, Abbotsford, 2006, 42.

<sup>281</sup> *The Abbotsford News*, 26 May 2005.

<sup>282</sup> DesMazes, "Abbotsford Airport Celebrates."

communities and the country's aviation history. Indeed, few Canadians realize that many of our modern day airports can trace their origins back to the BCATP.<sup>283</sup> While the immediate purpose of the BCATP was to provide the aircraft, airfields, pilots, and other trained personnel urgently needed at the start of World War Two, the plan would also end up providing an unexpected legacy to not only the communities that found themselves home to the airfields, but also to the country as a whole.

According to Alistair MacKenize, the author of the article, while the initial plan called for fifty-training airfields to be developed, by the time the war was won eighty-eight bases had been established across the country.<sup>284</sup> From a logistical point of view, the challenges associated with such a massive yet time constrained project were obvious. From an engineering perspective, it was "excellent project management, organization, and standardized designs" that allowed these facilities to be built so proficiently.<sup>285</sup> Runway layouts, standardized into an equilateral triangle pattern, allowed aircraft to take off and land regardless of wind direction. Thirty five million square yards of runway and other paving were laid. Support facilities, including 700 hangars, workshops, machine shops, boiler rooms, administration offices, classrooms, barrack blocks, mess blocks, hospitals, motor pools, recreation halls and club rooms brought the total number of buildings to some 8300.<sup>286</sup> While the task of building thousands of buildings and laying millions of yards of pavement had an immediate impact on

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<sup>283</sup> Alistair Mackenzie, "A CSCE National Historic Civil Engineering Project Lays the Groundwork for Canada's Present Air Transportation Infrastructure," *Canadian Civil Engineer*, October 2001.

<sup>284</sup> Mackenzie, "A CSCE Project."

<sup>285</sup> Mackenzie, "A CSCE Project."

<sup>286</sup> Mackenzie, "A CSCE Project."

communities across the country, when the war was won Canada was left with a large number of airfields that the RCAF eventually transferred to municipal governments. The BCATP legacy, then, is evident in a “valuable post-war air transportation infrastructure.”<sup>287</sup>

British Columbia’s gradual transformation as a result of the plan should not be underestimated. Today, Boundary Bay Airport and the Abbotsford International Airport provide “vital links in Canada’s internal [flight] routes” and function as important municipal and international hubs. Indeed, “the legacy of the airfields from the BCATP gave Canada a jump start to the new air transportation age that was to follow World War Two.”<sup>288</sup> They were uniquely located based on topographical and infrastructure requirements, as well as proximity to established communities, allowing them to serve a great number of commercial and social services after the war.

This account of the BCATP legacy in Delta and Abbotsford is not meant to be exhaustive. Telling the entire story of these aerodromes from 1945 onward would be well beyond the scope of this research. Rather, this brief summary illustrates that the impact and influence of the BCATP did not end with the war. The human impact continued with men and women relocating as a result of relationships, business opportunities, and perhaps even a sense of adventure. In addition, the significance of the infrastructure left behind in both communities cannot be overstated. While both airports went through various transformations between 1945 to the present, it is clear that these aerodromes, initially built to

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<sup>287</sup> Mackenzie, “A CSCE Project.”

<sup>288</sup> Mackenzie, “A CSCE Project.”

train pilots and aircrew, have evolved to occupy a central role in the economic and transportation infrastructure of not only Delta and Abbotsford, but also the province and the country.

## Conclusion

In their study on the impact of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan on Saskatchewan communities, Brereton Greenhous and Norman Hillmer concluded that “impact and influence are difficult and imprecise terms.”<sup>289</sup> Despite the challenges associated with defining and measuring these terms, they argue persuasively that there was a substantial economic and social impact on the prairie communities that hosted BCATP stations. The case studies of Delta and Abbotsford present similar findings. The historian trying to assess the impact and influence of the BCATP is sometimes left grappling with terms that do not always offer clear quantitative evidence. At the same time, this author would argue that while these terms may be imprecise, or even vague, they are, paradoxically, easy to identify.

There are many instances where clear quantitative evidence, demonstrating the impact of the BCATP, is available. E.M. Patterson sold 420 acres of land for \$76,000 dollars to the Federal Government to allow the Boundary Bay Airfield to be built. Local construction companies received a \$210,000 contract to help complete the project. No fewer than six local companies participated in the construction of the Abbotsford Airport in conjunction with the King Paving Company. Over one hundred civilians were employed at the No. 5 OTU Abbotsford Detachment, with similar numbers employed at No. 8 EFTS in Delta. Base populations also underscore the

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<sup>289</sup> Greenhous and Hillmer, “The Impact of the BCATP,” 141.

influence that the BCATP had on the communities, especially in Abbotsford where the base personnel often outnumbered local residents by a ratio of two to one. The Ladner Dugout Committee often drew more than one thousand guests to their gatherings, and the Abbotsford Town Hall was equally popular. Open Houses at both airports attracted an enormous number of visitors with twenty thousand people attending the Boundary Bay Lancaster display and fifteen thousand attending the Abbotsford open house.

Anecdotal stories also featured prominently in this study. Training accidents, for example, were closely followed in both communities, most notably the exploits of Sergeant Scratch in Delta and the collision of two Liberators on the Abbotsford runway. Well over one hundred planes were involved in accidents at the two airfields, many taking place precariously close to residents of the surrounding communities. Fortunately, no civilians were harmed in these accidents but they occupied an identifiable role in civilian-airmen interactions. The popularity of the Dugout amongst local high school students proved to be a significant concern for Delta citizens, many of whom demanded that the venue deny entrance to those less than eighteen years of age because their children were falling asleep in class after late night forays. Another immeasurable, but prominent piece of evidence is the detailed coverage that both training schools received in local newspapers. *The Optimist* and the *ASM News* both chronicled station developments on a regular basis, itself an indication of the interest that residents had in these schools. Base openings were met with excitement in Delta but indifference in Abbotsford, but the closings were front page news in

both communities, with writers invoking an unmistakably sombre tone when describing the final days of the BCATP sites.

It is hoped that this research has filled one small gap in a body of historical knowledge that has been left largely unexplored. While the experience of these two BC communities as part of the BCATP offered a wealth of information and some illuminating conclusions, there remains a great deal of research that still needs to be conducted. First and foremost, Delta and Abbotsford are only two of the six BC communities that hosted BCATP bases during the Second World War. The histories of Sea Island, Comox, Vancouver and Patricia Bay, as they relate to the BCATP, remain untold. Any historian researching the impact of the war on BC communities would not be misguided in exploring these relationships. Next, because of the limitations of this thesis, some of the topics discussed in the preceding chapters warrant greater attention. The legacy of the Delta and Abbotsford aerodromes are at the top of this list. Both airports underwent significant transformations from 1945 to the present day, and telling this history would lend further support to the arguments presented in this thesis. We have seen the end result of these developments as both airports have to come to occupy an important role in their present day communities; finding out how they arrived at this point would be equally interesting. Similarly, a closer look at the postwar populations and demographics of these communities is also worth exploring given the anecdotal evidence that shows at least some movement of men and women as a result of their connection to the bases. Within the immediate context of the wartime impact, the connection between pilot training,

flight instructors and training accidents also warrants further attention. There is evidence to suggest that many of these “accidents” could be attributed to more than just rookie airmen. The role of women in the BCATP also deserves greater attention. BC bases were some of the first BCATP sites to employ women, and a comparison with other provinces would be pertinent.

As is the case with many historical inquiries, the researcher is often left with some answers, but even more questions. This is the case with this investigation into the relationship between two BC communities and one of Canada’s most significant contributions to the Second World War. That being said, combining the quantitative and qualitative evidence makes it easy to conclude that the BCATP had a significant impact on the communities of Delta and Abbotsford. This impact can be measured in both economic and human terms. In both communities airports were built exclusively as part of the RCAF program to train pilots and each case the population of each base formed a large proportion of the community. There were heavy demands placed on the resources of these communities as the BCATP bases looked to them to provide labour for base construction and maintenance and services for the airmen who served on them. Evidence also points to a reciprocal relationship between the two institutions, with residents taking an interest in the stations while Commonwealth airmen generally enjoyed their time in both towns. Goodwill is an accurate descriptor for this relationship with socialization between base personnel and local residents a common and enjoyable occurrence. When the war ended and pilot and aircrew training concluded, these stations were initially

met with an uncertain future. Today, however, these two sites, initially chosen to train allied pilots, have evolved into important players in Canada's transportation infrastructure, a final and enduring legacy of Canada's vital role in the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan.

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