

**Capital Skies:**

# HONOURING THE RCAF IN OTTAWA

*Ottawa*  
ARCHIVES



## Remarks from the City Archivist

From the early days of aviation, pioneering topographical mapping up and down the Ottawa River, to its founding as the Royal Canadian Air Force on April 1, 1924, the RCAF has been linked to the Nation's capital. It has also been joined to Ottawa as a City, and has grown with us, defining our landscape, providing jobs during wartime, and representing us on the world stage.

Please join us, as we present this short introduction to Ottawa's RCAF, in congratulating them on their centenary.

**Paul J Henry**

*City Archivist*

## Acknowledgements

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Cover photo: A supersonic F-104 fighter plane parked in front of a WWI German A.E.G. during a meeting of the Canadian Aviation Historical Society, 1972. City of Ottawa Archives / CA028169

Back cover photo: Voyageur helicopter at Uplands Airport, 1973  
City of Ottawa Archives / CA028175

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RCAF Central bandmen sound their Coronation trumpets from the battlements of the Peace Tower, 1955  
City of Ottawa Archives / CA034030

# Honouring the RCAF in Ottawa

**In 2024, the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) will celebrate its 100th anniversary. To honour the RCAF's longstanding service to Canada, the City of Ottawa Archives is presenting RCAF photographs, documents, and artifacts from its collection.**

From the establishment of the first military air force station here in 1920 until the closure of CFB Rockcliffe and CFB Uplands in 1995, Ottawa has been the site of numerous significant RCAF operations, especially training, experimentation, photography, and testing.

Ottawa was able to honour the RCAF during the Second World War with its participation in the Hollywood film “Captain of the Clouds”, but it was the people serving here who made the real connection between the City and the RCAF, including women like Ottawa’s own Beulah Ward, an RCAF servicewoman, and some who served here but never returned from the war, like local boy Reginald “Mickey” Hicks.



**Celebrating the 30th Birthday of the RCAF, 1954**  
City of Ottawa Archives  
CA003923

**The 1954 Air Show at RCAF Rockcliffe Air Station, which welcomed more than 25,000 attendees that year**  
City of Ottawa Archives  
CA004598



## A Timeline of Ottawa and the RCAF:

# 100 Years of the Royal Canadian Air Force in the Nation's Capital

**The RCAF has a rich and celebrated history in Canada. This timeline provides a glimpse of Ottawa's role as part of the evolution of the RCAF from its unofficial start as the Canadian Air Force in 1920 until today. National events in the RCAF's history that have impacted Ottawa's role are italicized in blue.**

*This timeline is not a comprehensive listing.*

## 1920s

### 1920

*February 18, Order in Council authorized the formation of a new Canadian Air Force (CAF) as a non-permanent, non-professional force under administration of the Air Board.*

Air Board established stations in Vancouver, Morely, AB, Roberval, QC and Ottawa. The Ottawa Air Station (in Rockcliffe) became a combined seaplane and landplane base for civil flying operations. Services at these stations included forest fire protection patrols, reconnaissance surveys and aerial photography. An experimental aerial survey was undertaken in Ottawa between July and November.



**A de Havilland Canada DHC-3 Otter at Rockcliffe Air Station, 1954**

City of Ottawa Archives / CA004470

## 1923

*January 1, the Department of National Defence (DND) was formed, responsible for the existing Department of Militia and Defence, the Department of Naval Service, and the Air Board. CAF becomes responsible for all flying operations, including civil aviation.*

*February 12, Royal designation is bestowed on the CAF by His Majesty King George V.*

## 1924

*April 1, the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) became a permanent component in Canada's defence force.*

*April 18, DND and Department of the Interior officials developed a 5-year plan for aerial surveys and protective forestry work.*

## 1925

RCAF units were given service designations. Shirleys Bay was a sea plane base, while No. 1 Depot at Victoria Island was for winter overhauls of aircraft and equipment, with a central stores depot.

Library of aerial photos established in Ottawa by Order in Council, becoming the basis for the National Air Photo Library.



**RCAF Ottawa Air Station, Rockcliffe, 1930s**

Ingenium Archives, CAVM Photograph Collection, CAVM-19185

## 1927

As part of a reorganization most air units, including the Photographic section in Ottawa and the Operational station at Shirleys Bay, were allocated to the Civil Government Air Operations for testing, experiments, and photography.

The Post Office Department worked to establish regular air mail services. The Ottawa Air Station made ten experimental flights between September 12 and November 11 to improve transatlantic mail delivery.

## 1928

One of eight RCAF pigeon lofts in Canada was established at Rockcliffe to house and train homing pigeons.

Eighty-eight thousand aerial photographs, covering 64,400 square miles, were taken by eight Photographic Detachments controlled from Ontario. The Photographic Section, in the Jackson Building, Ottawa received 1,002 rolls of film for developing and printing.



Squadron Leader A.E. Godfrey and Flight Sergeant M. Graham completed a Trans Canada Survey flight from Ottawa to Vancouver in an FC-2w between September 5 to 8.



**RCAF Training School at Uplands, 1940s**

Ingenium Archives, CAVM Photograph Collection, CAVM-20348

**1929**

The National Research Council (NRC) established the Aeronautical Research section.



**Fairchild 71C at Rockcliffe Air Station, 1933**

Ingenium Archives, CAVM Photograph Collection, CAVM-02409

**1930s**

**1932**

Ottawa Air Station continued flights for mail pickup and delivery to inbound and outbound steamers, with a total of 732 hours flown between June 28 and August 17.

**1933**

Many National Defence operations were conducted by the Ottawa Stations during this period. Test Flight, the Aeronautical Engineering Division and the National Research Council worked together to test and develop aircraft and equipment. This included the tri-camera mount for aerial photography and trials using an automatic pilot.



**A Ford Trimotor RCAF WZ 6-AT-AS at Rockcliffe Air Station, 1934**

Ingenium Archives, CAVM Photograph Collection, CAVM-02545

### **1934**

RAF Furies and RCAF Siskins presented their combined skills over Ottawa during a goodwill tour as part of Toronto's Centennial celebrations. Proceeds supported the RCAF Benevolent fund.

### **1936**

Ottawa Photographic Section was moved from the Jackson Building to Rockcliffe and renamed the Photographic Establishment.

### **1939**

*December 17, the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand signed the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan Agreement (BCATP) in Ottawa. The plan is to be organized and administered by RCAF.*

Uplands officially became a Canadian Forces Base when selected as the site for one of Canada's first Service Flying Training Schools (SFTS) under the BCATP.

A de Havilland DH 60 M Gipsy Moth in Ottawa. In the 1930s, the Moth became a standard trainer for RCAF pilots. An Avro Avian rests behind, 1930  
Ingenium Archives, CAVM Photograph Collection, CAVM-03068

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## 1940s

**1940**

No. 2 SFTS Uplands was officially opened by the Governor General, the Earl of Athlone.

**1941**

*Canadian Women's Auxiliary Air Force (CWAAF) began recruiting women for ground trades. A total of 17,038 women enlisted with 1,500 having served overseas by the end of the Second World War.*



**Members of the RCAF Women's Division at work in an operations room in Eastern Canada, circa 1940s**  
Ingenium Archives, CN Images of Canada Collection, X14763

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“Captains of the Clouds” starring James Cagney was filmed on location at No. 2 SFTS Uplands.

Avro Anson Twin engine Bomber frames were manufactured by Ottawa Car & Aircraft Ltd. at 301 Slater Street, Ottawa.



RCAF aircrew pose for a group photo in front of an Avro Anson, a plane commonly used for training bomber crews, circa 1942

City of Ottawa Archives / CA028143

## 1942

*On January 2, the first trained members of CWAAF posted to British Commonwealth Air Training Plan Agreement stations. CWAAF was renamed RCAF Women's Division on February 3.*

With the increasing number of applicants to the Women's Division, No. 7 Manning Depot was relocated from Toronto to Rockcliffe.

RCAF Detachment Carp was constructed as a relief landing field for No. 2 SFTS at RCAF Station Uplands.

Secondary Relief Landing Field was established in Edwards to support No. 2 SFTS at RCAF Station Uplands.

Lancaster Bomber parts manufacturing including bomb doors, flaps, ailerons, and elevators was contracted to Ottawa Car & Aircraft Ltd.

**1945**

*British Commonwealth Air Training Plan agreement is ended on March 31.*



Reginald "Mickey" Hicks and a fellow pilot, 1941-1943  
City of Ottawa Archives / CA028140

No. 2 SFTS

is closed at

Uplands. The

base continued to serve as a non-flying unit, providing services for Practice Flight, Construction Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. October sees formation of Maintenance Command at Uplands.

Gloster Meteor F-111, the RCAF's first fighter jet, test flown at Rockcliffe.

Post-war Rockcliffe continued to fly a variety of light and medium transports and to provide refresher training for pilots, navigators, and wireless operators, and returned to aerial photographic survey work.

The RCAF sent airlifts of penicillin from Rockcliffe to Warsaw, Poland, using B-17s. Five shipments were sent between October 1945 and January 5, 1946. The second shipment on October 31, carrying 5,500 lbs., crashed near Halle, Germany. The RCAF was able to deliver eight tons of penicillin.

No. 1 Photo Establishment Rockcliffe was responsible for the processing of all survey film and print development. During this time, they processed approximately 372,930 feet of film, and over 100,000 service prints were put out per month.

**1947**

*June 14 saw the first RCAF Day celebrated at stations and units throughout the Dominion.*

RCAF Station Uplands disbanded from Maintenance Command, moving to Air Force headquarters.

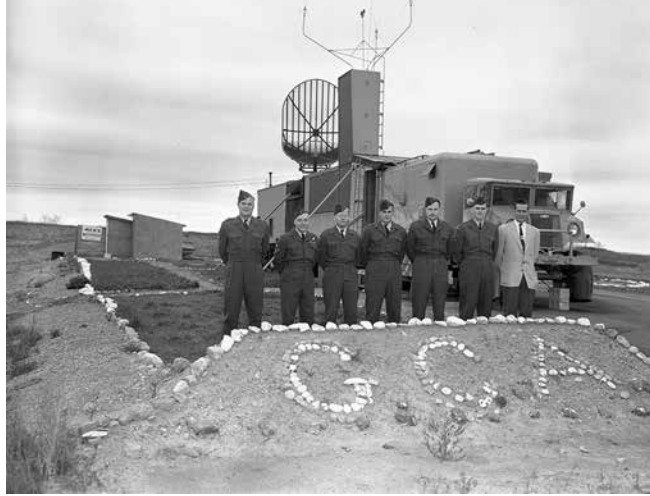
**1949**

A North Star from the Experimental and Proving Establishment, Rockcliffe, completed the first non-stop TransCanada Flight.



**A Leading Aircraft Woman offers Officers from the No. 428 All-Weather Fighter Jet Squadron, the "Ghost Squadron," applications for Canada Savings Bonds, 1954**  
City of Ottawa Archives / CA005678

**The Ground Control  
Approach (GCA) crew  
at Uplands, 1954**  
City of Ottawa Archives  
CA005828



## 1950s & 1960s

### 1950

Air Raid Warning Units were established at Uplands, and a Quick Reaction Alert hanger was developed for fighter-interceptors to be stationed on alert.

### 1951

The expansion of Uplands Airport with 3,800 acres of land being added to allow for a joint military-civilian airport.

The Central Experimental and Proving Establishment (CEPE) formed at Rockcliffe. This amalgamated the Experimental Development Establishment at Rockcliffe, the Winter Experimental establishment at Edmonton and the RCAF NRC detachment at Arnprior.

### 1952

Uplands was reinstated as the official welcomer to Royalty and heads of state. The first post-war visit of a ruling monarch was Queen Juliana of the Netherlands, with her husband Prince Bernhard. Other notable figures included Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Philip, the Queen Mother, British Prime Minister Eden, Australian Prime Minister Menzies, Indian Prime Minister Nehru, and American President Eisenhower.

**1956**

On May 15, a CF-100 Fighter Jet crashed into the Villa St-Louis in Orleans. There were fifteen casualties, including eleven members of the Grey Nuns. The convent was destroyed.

**1957**

The CEPE was moved to Uplands.

On March 1, an RCAF B-25 Mitchell bomber on CEPE service was en route to RCAF Uplands after a flight from Churchill, MB. On board were Air Vice Marshal Robert C. Ripley, RCAF's chief of Air Material Command who was co-piloting the plane, along with seven additional RCAF personnel. After a stop to refuel in North Bay, ON, the plane was on track to land at Uplands. The crew had been in radio contact with Uplands shortly before 9 pm and were circling over Manotick waiting for their turn to land. Minutes later, the plane crashed into a farmer's field. Stunned residents of Manotick spoke of sounds of large



**Members of the 412 Transport Squadron stand next to a RCAF Dakota, 1955**  
City of Ottawa Archives / CA035228



**Members of the Ground Control Approach (GCA) crew at Uplands, 1954**  
City of Ottawa Archives / CA028189



explosions and a flash of light that lit up the sky. An investigation into the crash was conducted by the RCAF, but no cause was ever determined. A funeral parade for the men marched at RCAF Station, Rockcliffe, and was attended by more than a thousand relatives, friends and service personnel. Four of the men were laid to rest at Beechwood Cemetery, while the four remaining servicemen were returned to their hometowns.



**Aerial of RCAF Station Uplands, 1957**  
City of Ottawa Archives / CA008100



**An RCAF evaluation team examines a newly arrived Hunting Percival Jet Provost, a training aircraft for jet pilots, 1956**  
City of Ottawa Archives / CA040715

## 1959

Queen Elizabeth II unveiled the Commonwealth Air Force memorial in Ottawa, honouring the 809 men and women who died on duty during the Second World War with no known graves.



Two members of the 445 Squadron pose with their CF-100 "Canuck" at Uplands after setting a Toronto-Ottawa speed record of 23 minutes, 1956  
City of Ottawa Archives / CA040573

## 1960

The National Aviation Museum opened at Uplands.

## 1964

Flying operations ended at the Rockcliffe base, with administrative and logistic functions remaining. Control of the airfield was given back to The Rockcliffe Flying Club.

## 1965

The National Aviation Museum moved to its new permanent home at Rockcliffe.

## 1967

On December 17, a Canadian altitude record of 100,110 feet was set by Wing Commander R. A White while flying a Lockheed-built CF-104 from Uplands.

## 1970 until present

**1971**

The airborne sensing unit formed at Uplands to conduct tests using several types of aircraft.

The CEPE merged with the No. 448 Test Squadron (Cold Lake, AL) and the VX10 Squadron (Shearwater, NS) to become the Aerospace Engineering Test Establishment. The new establishment was moved from Uplands to Cold Lake, Alberta.

**1972**

CFB Ottawa was formed when the bases at Uplands and Rockcliffe were amalgamated, redesignating these bases CFB Ottawa North and CFB Ottawa South.



**Canadian Forces Air Demonstration Team, the Snowbirds, at Uplands, 1975**  
City of Ottawa Archives / CA028170

**1983**

On May 25, a sod -turning ceremony was held at Rockcliffe for a new building to house the National Aviation Museum.



**First Chinook helicopter to arrive at the Canadian Forces Base in Uplands, 1975**  
City of Ottawa Archives / CA028171

**1993**

The civilian side of Uplands was renamed the Ottawa Macdonald-Cartier International Airport.



**CAF pilot onboard a Voyageur helicopter surveys an area during a search and rescue mission, 1973**

City of Ottawa Archives / CA028176

**1995**

*The Department of National Defence consolidation in the 1990s saw many bases close or downsize.*

As a result of these DND consolidations, both the Uplands and Rockcliffe bases were closed. Uplands maintained some administrative and logistical support.



A service woman at work at CFB Uplands, 1976  
City of Ottawa Archives / CA028183

**2018**

DND announced the Aerospace Engineering Test Establishment would be moving back to Uplands from Cold Lake, AB. Delays in the renovations had the move in date set for 2025.



**Airwomen of the RCAF, from *She Serves – that men may fly*, 1940s**  
City of Ottawa Archives / RGR001-2-2-11, Betty Marwood collection

## The Women's Division of the RCAF

The establishment of the Women's Division of the Royal Canadian Air Force on July 2, 1941, marked the first time Canadian women entered the active service corps. Beginning with trades such as cooking, cleaning, and nursing, women slowly entered non-combatant roles in the RCAF, filling positions previously held by men.

The No. 7 Manning Depot in Rockcliffe was one of the training centres for the RCAF (W.D.), headed under the capable management of Squadron Officer Kathleen O. Walker and later Wing Officer Willa Walker. Women from all over Canada, including Ottawa, volunteered to serve in the RCAF (W.D.), many with fathers, brothers, boyfriends, and husbands already serving, dead or imprisoned. The Women's Division was the first step toward women's full participation in the RCAF.

## Sergeant Molly Beall

Sgt. Moretta (Molly) Beall flew in the photographic division of the Air Force in the Women's Division, later distinguishing herself as a pilot. Originally from Lindsay, ON, Ms. Beall trained in Ottawa and returned to Ottawa following the war. There she joined the Ottawa Flying Club and gained her private and commercial flying licences before becoming the first woman to secure a flying instructor's licence under the sponsorship of the Department of Veteran's Affairs (DVA).

In 1947, as the only female contestant, she competed for the title of top amateur flyer for the John C. Webster Memorial Trophy and was awarded the Sandersen Shield for second place.



**A service woman at work at metal shear, CFB Uplands, 1976**  
City of Ottawa Archives / CA028184



**RCAF Airwomen on station from *She Serves – that men may fly*, 1940s**  
City of Ottawa Archives / RGR001-2-2-11,  
Betty Marwood collection

***She Serves – that men may fly* information booklet for the RCAF Women's Division, 1940s**  
City of Ottawa Archives / RGR001-2-2-11,  
Betty Marwood collection



## **Squadron Officer Kathleen O. Walker**

Squadron Officer Kathleen O. Walker was the first Canadian woman to receive an appointment in the RCAF. Her capable leadership was developed as organizer and first commandant of the Red Cross Transport Corps in Ottawa, which she joined after the death of her husband, Flight Lieutenant C.C. Walker, in 1941. She received the first-ever promotion in the Women's Division of the RCAF in 1942 when she was promoted to Squadron Officer. Squadron Officer Kathleen O. Walker died in 1974 at the age of 72 and is buried in the Notre-Dame Cemetery in Ottawa.







**Mickey Hicks feeds pigeons in Trafalgar Square, 1941-1943**  
City of Ottawa Archives  
CA028141

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## **Sergeant Reginald (Mickey) Hicks**

Reginald McLeod “Mickey” Hicks, son of cheese inspector Thomas James Hicks and Annie Florence McLeod, was born on January 29, 1920, in North Gower, ON. At the age of eight, he suffered from scarlet fever. At the age of sixteen, he received the best athlete and best sport awards from the Boys Scouts in North Gower. He attended schools locally, before moving to Kemptville in 1937 for a year of technical school. This led to work involving tinsmithing, plumbing and electrical wiring with his uncle Kenneth Edward Hicks in Richmond.

Hicks left this work in 1941 to sign up with the RCAF for flying. He attended training across the country; #31 Radio School in Clinton, No. 5 Initial Training School at Belleville, No. 13 Service Flying Training School in Quebec, and Composite Training School in Trenton. In July 1942, now an air bomber, Mickey was posted to Lethbridge, AB for Bombing and Gunning School. After two further months of training in Edmonton, he left for Halifax, to be deployed in Europe. On October 9, 1942, he was awarded the Air Nav Badge.

In January 1943, he was stationed at 22 Operational Training Unit, Wellesbourne. He started taking notes in The Aeroplane Diary 1943 that had been given to him by an English woman named Edie, noting that he performed his first flip on January 21. In April of 1943, he was posted with 408 “Goose” Squadron. Soon he had eight operational trips and 43 operational hours over German territory.

Five minutes before midnight on July 3, 1943, Hicks and his fellow crewmen left their airbase at RAF Leeming in Yorkshire, England, to conduct operations, along with 651 other aircraft, in their Halifax II over Cologne, Germany, and were due back before 5 am. The bombing raid was thought successful, knocking out twenty industrial targets, though with 600 people killed and 72,000 unable to return to their homes. Thirty aircraft were lost in the attack, most downed by German Jagdgeschwader 300 fighters. The Halifax II in which Hicks served was shot down at 3:08 am by Uffz. Dickhaus of Nachtjagdgeschwader 4 and crashed at Bonneleau, France. Six were killed in the crash, with Air Gunner Sergeant Paul Emile Cote, the sole survivor



**Reginald "Mickey" Hicks stands beside an airplane, 1941-1943**  
City of Ottawa Archives / CA028142

of the crew, being taken prisoner. None were older than twenty-three. Another Goose Squadron Halifax was shot down over Tessengerlo, Belgium.

His father received a telegram in North Gower on July 17 announcing that he was missing, and presumed dead. A letter from Wing Commander Ferris of 408 Squadron dated July 6 was also sent. Both suggested that he may have been captured. The *Ottawa Journal* reported him missing as late as August 12 and did not report that he was presumed dead until December 3. Hicks's death was commemorated in France at Poix-de-la-Somme Churchyard, Row E, Grave 8. He was posthumously awarded the Canadian Voluntary Service Medal and the War Medal 1939–45. His mother received a Memorial Cross.

Sergeant Air Bomber Reginald McLeod Hicks was a charismatic, athletic young man, and those who knew him, including those he met during his service in Europe, spoke highly of his character and friendship.

**Telegram informing J T Hicks that his son, Reginald Hicks, is missing believed killed, July 17, 1943**  
 City of Ottawa Archives  
 RGR001-2-2-8, Reginald McLeod "Mickey" Hicks collection

CLASS OF SERVICE	SYMBOL
Full-Paid Message	
Day Letter	D L
Night Message	N M
Night Letter	N L

If none of these three symbols appears after the check number of message this is a full-rate message. Compare its character to indicated by the symbol appearing after the check.

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MR J T HICKS REPORT DELIVERY  
 NORTHGOWER ONT 762

19103 REGRET TO ADVISE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS QUOTING  
 GERMAN INFORMATION STATES YOUR SON SERGEANT REGINALD MCLEOD  
 HICKS LOST HIS LIFE JULY FOURTH BUT DOES NOT GIVE ADDITIONAL  
 PARTICULARS STOP PENDING FURTHER CONFIRMATION YOUR SON IS TO  
 BE CONSIDERED MISSING BELIEVED KILLED STOP PLEASE ACCEPT MY  
 SINCERE SYMPATHY STOP LETTER FOLLOWS

RCAF CASUALTIES OFFICER.



**Fleet (Canada) Model 16B Finch 1. RCAF. Aircraft used in the film Captains of the Clouds, 1941**

Ingenium Archives, Ken Molson Fonds, KM-04916

## Captain of the Clouds, the RCAF Takes Centre Stage

Ottawa may not be Hollywood, but, in 1941, Hollywood made a historical first when a large crew from Warner Bros. packed up their bags and came to film the war film “Captains of the Clouds”. James “Jimmy” Cagney starred as confident bush pilot Brian Maclean along with supporting cast Dennis Morgan, Alan Hale and Brenda Marshall in this film celebrating the Royal Canadian Air Force.

It was a uniquely Canadian production. Air and military scenes were filmed at RCAF bases in Ottawa, Trenton and North Bay, while Canadian parachutes and office equipment were carefully selected for the interior scenes filmed back in Hollywood. An authentic representation of Canada was well-achieved overall, excepting some minor changes to the layout of downtown Ottawa.

Advertisement for  
Captains of the Clouds  
at the Capitol Theatre  
The Ottawa Journal, 1942  
City of Ottawa Archives  
MG011

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In Ottawa, the arrival of the celebrated movie stars brought a wave of excitement to the city. Crowds gathered clamouring for autographs, eventually requiring the artillery to clear a path for Cagney and his co-stars. Ottawa featured heavily in the film, with prominent landmarks such as the Parliament buildings, the Chateau Laurier, and the National War Memorial, as well as the complicated filming of the authentic “Wings Parade” for RCAF graduates.

The actors flattered the city and its citizens. Cagney spoke warmly of Ottawa, telling reporters, “I have never been so pleased with any place I have visited... Ottawa has such a clean look and I was especially struck with the absence of billboards.” Supporting actors Dennis Morgan and Alan Hale also enjoyed their time in the Canadian capital, and warmly entertained two twelve-year-old boys they met on a canal cruise.

Air Marshal William A. “Billy” Bishop of Ottawa was called a great actor by those on set, though he himself did not feel comfortable with his performance until he watched the professional actors mess up their lines as well. Rita Cross, a young Ottawa woman, travelled with the actors to North Bay as a stand-in for the leading lady.

The movie was highly anticipated and well-received by Canadians, and was celebrated for its fantastic aerobatic displays and stunt flying, coordinated by Frank Clark, the chief pilot. “Captains of the Clouds” premiered in Ottawa on February 12, 1942. The premiere was attended by Prime Minister Mackenzie King and members of his cabinet, and by the Governor General and his wife, Princess Alice.



**Captain of the Clouds** director Michael Curtiz (right) is pictured as he arrived at Malton Airport (now Toronto Pearson International,) with Squadron-Leader Owen Cathcart-Jones and Stewardess Edna Belden. The film would be nominated for two Oscars at the 15th Academy Awards, though perhaps Curtiz is best known for the film he directed next: *Casablanca*.

Ingenium Archives, X-11923

## Tragedy at Villa St. Louis



**Interior view of the Grey Nuns' convent, Villa St. Louis, Orleans, 1954**

City of Ottawa Archives / CA004409

On the evening of May 15, 1956, a CF-100 jet fell from 33,000 feet and dove into the side of Villa St. Louis, a rest home for the Grey Nuns of the Cross in Orleans. Fifteen people were killed, including eleven nuns, their cook and the two men in the plane. The blast was heard as far away as fifteen miles, and the reflection of the explosion in the night sky could be seen in Richmond and Manotick.

The community around the convent rallied directly after the crash, saving the lives of twenty of the women. There was nothing to be done for the other fifteen.



Lawrence Barber, who climbed up the fire escape and helped six nuns to safety, attempted to break into other bedrooms on the second and third floors despite already receiving burns himself. “I couldn’t get in, because of the flame... I could hear nuns screaming... I could hear nuns pounding on the wall.”

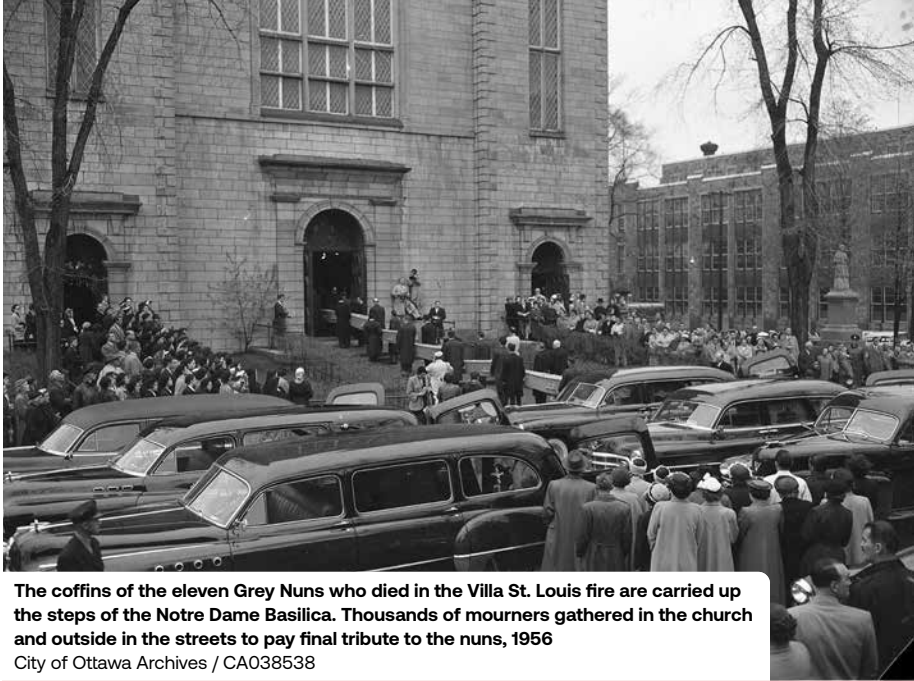
That night they found four bodies, including that of Rev. Richard Ward who was thrown 150 feet from the building and died soon after on the lawn where the rescuers had laid him. Ray Rainville was thrown out of his bed in his home over a half-mile from the impact and was among those first on the scene. He helped to rescue ten of those who escaped. “All I could think was to get there as fast as I could. I wasn’t alone and I’m proud of my neighbours. They didn’t care if they were burned or hurt. They just tore at that building until human hands couldn’t do any more. Then we prayed.”

The jet had been one of two sent into the air to confirm the identity of an unknown aircraft, a North Star Transport whose flight plan had not been received.

**The remains of  
Villa St. Louis after  
a devastating fire  
caused by an RCAF  
plane crash, 1956**  
City of Ottawa Archives  
CA024615

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**The coffins of the eleven Grey Nuns who died in the Villa St. Louis fire are carried up the steps of the Notre Dame Basilica. Thousands of mourners gathered in the church and outside in the streets to pay final tribute to the nuns, 1956**  
City of Ottawa Archives / CA038538

The two jets then rose up to 33,000 feet after completion to complete a training exercise and burn excess fuel that would prevent them from landing. The first jet began the descent while the second radioed that it still had excess fuel and would remain at altitude. That was its final message before the crash.

The cause of the crash was never determined, but it was believed both the pilot, Flight Officer William J. Schmidt, aged twenty-five and respected as a “good and conscientious flyer,” and navigator Flight Officer Kenneth D. Thomas, aged twenty, were dead or unconscious at the time, probably due to an oxygen system failure or internal explosion. No trace of the use of ejection seats or parachutes were found.

A memorial service was held May 23 at St. Joseph’s Church, attended by many high-ranking military officials. Three RCAF buglers performed the Last Post and an RCAF band played at the service. It was well attended by a devastated community.

## Supersonic Jet Shatters Glass at New Uplands



**Ottawa's new Air Terminal at Uplands Airport, which was set to open in August of 1959**

City of Ottawa Archives / CA028185

A gleaming passenger terminal of steel and glass, the New Uplands Air Terminal in Ottawa was planned to open in the fall of 1959. The “lean and shining civilian centre” boasted a restaurant, lounge, coffee room and impressive spectators’ decks, in addition to the necessary customs services, offices and waiting rooms. The passenger terminal even included the newly introduced conveyor baggage claim.

Ottawa would have to wait for their metropolitan airport, however, due to the dramatic boom of progress that occurred just over a month before opening. On August 6, United States Air Force Capt. G.L. Schulstad accidentally caused a sonic boom only a few hundred feet above the building .

The boom, which occurred due to lagging instruments while taking an F-104 Starfighter on a familiarization flight, blew out all the windows in the building, causing a six-month delay in the opening and a \$500,000 price tag.

Initial estimates were \$5,000 of damage, to which a Transport Department Official responded: “That won’t pay the cost of picking up the glass.” Some blamed the airport for not withstanding the blow, while others blamed more exclusively the flight path and excessive speed of the plane that broke the sound barrier and called for stricter regulations for pilots. The air terminal had a somewhat anticlimactic official opening in the beginning of July 1960, with speeches from Prime Minister Diefenbaker, Ottawa Mayor George H. Nelms and other officials who praised the futuristic building as a monument to peace. An Ottawa Journal article reporting the event noted that “None of the speakers... mentioned the incident.”

**The aftermath of a sonic blast on the Air Terminal at Uplands Airport, 1960s**  
Ingenium/Canada Aviation and Space Museum,  
William A. Ramsay Fonds

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**1950s Tracker aircraft is examined by the National Aeronautical Establishment. Testing will determine if the plane's usefulness can be prolonged, 1978**  
City of Ottawa Archives / CA028180





**Capital Skies:**  
HONOURING THE  
RCAF IN OTTAWA