

Rivers Base - A Timeline

1930 - Rivers Airfield opened Feb. 17, 1930 - operation of mail planes began one week later

1932 - March 31, 1932 – Canada's airmail service ends. Deliveries had been made at Rivers Airfield. (90)

1937 - Dominion airway engineers selected a nearby site of 40 acres in connection with a prospective cross Canada air service.. Contract let for grading surfacing and fencing of Rivers Intermediate Aerodrome. P 99

1939 - A train carrying King George VI and Queen Elizabeth stops very briefly in Rivers on its way east. The King appeared in his dressing gown to wave a short greeting as the train as the train started moving.

World War 2 begins

1940 - Construction begins on buildings to be used by the Royal Canadian Air Force training program.

- Announcement that 700 novice pilots from Trenton ON will be transferred to Rivers.

- The first family to arrive was that of Flt. Lieut. J.Hone.

- Housing becomes scarce. Town council encouraged conversion of all available space into apartments.

- War Services Committee organized.

- Hall on Second Street renamed the "Tailspin Inn"

1941 - The first Navigation School tragedy – five Canadian die as a plane crashed on takeoff

1942 - The Air Navigation School renamed in May 1942 under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) as No.1 Air Navigation School (No.1 ANS)

- In 1942, No.1 ANS merged with No.2 ANS from Pennfeld Ridge (New Brunswick) to form No.1 Central Navigation School (No.1 CNS)

1943

- The Town of Rivers launched Aid to Russia, Milk for Britain, Chinese and Greek WarRelief Funds

- A troop train and a general passenger train collided at St. Lazare and planes from the No.1 CNS were used to transport injured to the air station hospital

- The first army parachutists to jump in Canada flew from Rivers in June 1943 in a Lodestar aircraft to "drop" at Camp Shilo. They had been trained in England and the United States. (Heide)

1944

- The six ton bomb that destroyed the German battleship Tipitz was released by Rivers-born F/O Walter Daniel. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross

1945

- A trade group arranges a V-E Day Celebration. And launches a twelve-member Rehabilitation Committee.

- 1 Week after V-J Day , No1. CNS, the largest training centre of its kind on the North American continent, closed (temporarily) . The event was marked by Air Force Day – an event that drew about 12000 people – the greatest crowd to ever assemble in the region.

- In five years No. 1 CNS saw 126 classes graduate. Personnel at its peak totalled 3000.

- In October 1945 a plan for Army/ Air activities in Canada resulted in the formation of No. 1 Airborne Research and Development Centre located at Camp Shilo. By April 1947 sufficient progress had been made to permit the unit to be called the Joint Air School and it was moved to Rivers.

1947

- Jan. 15- RCAF Guards took charge of Rivers Airport.

- In 1947 the Canadian Parachute Training Centre, established at Camp Shilo in 1942, merged with the Airborne School of the Canadian Joint Air Training Centre and moved to RCAF Station Rivers, making the station Canada's main para-training centre.

- Joint Air School and it was moved from Camp Shilo to Rivers under the command of G/C M. G. Doyle. Its function was to meet all the requirements of training and development for the Canadian forces in tactical support of land and airborne operations.

- May 3 – first group of 300 trainees were transferred from Camp Shilo.

Carol Yvonne Schmitz was the first “air school child” born in Madden Nursing Home.

Also in 1947, the Army Aviation Tactical Training School was established at Rivers to provide pilot training to Army aviators, as well as helicopter instructor training for the Army, RCN and RCAF

444 Air Observation Post Squadron was formed on October 1st 1947, but disbanded on April 1st 1949.

1948

- Royal Canadian Navy personnel were added to the Joint Air Training school in August 1948.
- In 1948, the Joint Air Photo Interpretation School opened at Rivers. The school closed in 1960 and its personnel merged with the Air Photo Interpretation Centre at RCAF Station Rockcliffe (Ontario) who became fully responsible for training photo-interpreters.
- Contracts were let for the building of 100 housing units for the base followed by contracts for a further 375 dwellings. 150 of them were to be built in Rivers.

1949

- A change in organization in March 1949 created the Joint Air Training Centre out of the elements of the Joint Air School.
- 444 Air Observation Post Squadron was disbanded on April 1st 1949.
- Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent visits Rivers and the base

1950

- Korean War begins.

1951

- Oct. 28 visit by HRH Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh
50000 people from across Canada (and the U.S.) attend.

1952

- Sabre Jet flew from Edmonton to Rivers in 66 minutes
- air base search & rescue operations helped in the search for 3 escaped Brandon convicts

1953

- The Basic Helicopter Training Unit (BHTU) was established at Rivers in August 1953, initially to train RCAF pilots.

1954

Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip visit CJATC Rivers in autumn of 1954.

- Base Commanding Officer G/C J.A. Sproule, DFC and HRH Prince Philip. (Rob Sproule Collection)

1956

- By 1956, Army helicopters pilots were also training at Rivers. After the closure of the helicopter school at RCN Air Station HMCS Shearwater, the Royal Canadian Navy began sending trainees to Rivers as well, making the BHTU the first tri-service flying training unit in Canada.

1957

A ski hill operated just south of the base in the valley of the Little Saskatchewan.

Gerry Logan Collection

- 1962 with the closing of the Saskatoon Flying School – personnel were transferred to Rivers.

1960

- Joint Air Photo Interpretation School closed in 1960 and its personnel merged with the Air Photo Interpretation Centre at RCAF Station Rockcliffe (Ontario) who became fully responsible for training photo-interpreters.

1961

- As a practical example of service integration, the Canadian Joint Air Training Centre at Rivers, Manitoba, is living proof that the colour of the uniform a man wears is really immaterial when it comes to getting the job done. Permanent strength of 800 servicemen at CJATC is about one-half RCAF and one-half Army. Except for two months each summer when naval jet squadrons come to Rivers for tactical exercises, RCN strength is only a token force — but "blue jobs" and "brown jobs"

Stations of the RCAF:

CJATC RIVERS

By SQUADRON LEADER C. L. HEIDE, DFC (Reference: Roundel, October 1961, Vol. 13, No. 8)

1963

- In December 1963, No.1 Transport Helicopter Platoon (No.1 THP), a unit of the Royal Canadian Army Services Corps, was established at Rivers, along with their fleet of CH-113A Voyageur transport helicopters and on CH-112 Nomad. The platoon's function was to support the Army on field exercises

1964

- 408 Tactical Fighter Squadron, whose primary functions were reconnaissance and weapons delivery, moved to Rivers from RCAF Station Rockcliffe (Ontario)

Assumed the disparate roles of photo/recce (T-33 Flight), aerial photography (Dakota Flight) and paradrop/transport missions (C-119 Flight).

W/C Orpen follows the squadron from Rockcliffe, continuing as CO.

Unit disbanded on April 1st 1970.

1966

- No.1 THP moved to RCAF St.Hubert in 1966 and also established a detachment at RCAF Station Namao (Alberta).

In May, the C-119 aircraft are replaced by four C-130 (Hercules), which assume the former's role. In August W/C Orpen is succeeded by S/L P. BISSKY, who is followed 8 months later by W/C H.A. McKAY, DFC.

Cpl Wilf TRUNCHON, a photo technician with an unequalled 17 years of service with 408, is officially commended for proposing changes in airborne camera maintenance procedures, which ultimately result in annual savings of over \$3,600.

1966

During February and March the C-119 Transport Flight takes part in the NATO exercise "Winter Express," deploying men and equipment to Sola and Bardufoss in Norway.

In March, the squadron is transferred from Air Transport to Mobile Command.

15 April 1966

F/L John MOORE and his crew, in Hercules 10304, are cruising at 25,000' when the bolt securing the forward cargo door suddenly give way. The door comes open, is caught in the slipstream and is ripped upwards, taking out an inboard engine. With many of the aircraft's systems destroyed or failing, Moore, in an excellent display of airmanship, maintains control long enough to land, wheels down, in a farmer's field near Borden, Sask. In spite of a gaping hole in the fuselage, the explosive decompression, the lack of oxygen and the belly landing, miraculously none of the crew is injured.

May 1966

T-33 Flight commander S/L H.A. MCKAY, promoted to Wing Commander, is appointed 408's first fighter pilot Commanding Officer.

1967

A dozen military exercises are supported by 408 during the year. One is the deployment to Elmendorf AFB, near Anchorage, Alaska, in late January. John PRENDERGAST, S/L (Ret) remembers:

“Canada had a commitment under the ALCANUS (the defence of Alaska) agreement to provide an infantry battalion group and a tactical recce/support squadron. We were it, along with the Royal 22nd Battalion. The Americans had all sorts of National Guard Units, drawn from Alaska and down south, while our T-33s provided visual/photo recce information for the friendly forces. Enemy air opposition came from the National Guard F-84 Squadron.”

“The F-84 was quite superior to the T-33 and, on a number of occasions, our recce information was arbitrarily ruled inadmissible because it was taken for granted that our aircraft had been promptly shot down by an F-84!”

“Well on into the exercise one of our pilots (either F/L Bill NORN or Peter OLENICK), while returning from a recce, spotted a couple of F-84s cruising rather nonchalantly below him the opportunity could not be passed up. He dove on one of the F-84s, flicked on the nose oblique camera and, over a common exercise radio frequency imitated a sharp burst of gunfire and promptly raced off.”

“When we developed the film, an F-84 was beautifully framed on one of the negatives. At the end of the exercise there was a major debriefing for all the COs. At an appropriate moment, our CO, W/C “Bud” MCKAY, presented the CO of the F-84 Squadron with blown up copies of the negative, annotated with the date, time and approximate latitude and longitude, so that the ‘victim pilot’ could be pinned down.”

“Emblazoned across the top of the photo was a framed World War I phrase: “BEWARE THE HUN IN THE SUN.”

“Their CO assured us that this ‘trophy’ would be prominently displayed on the crew notice board back home.”

1968

- The Canadian Forces were unified and an era of budget cuts begins. Rivers was declared surplus to defence needs, as were several other bases across the country

Exercise "Vacuum," held in the fall, involved most units of the Canadian Army as well as elements from British and American forces. In addition to the usual recce and attack missions, 408 flew simulated chemical warfare sorties against live troops. Seven T-33s, in line abreast formation, overflowed the 'enemy' front line, delivering a cloud of offensive gas over the massed infantry. Its effectiveness may be measured by the fact that no chemical exercise of similar scope has since been requested by the Army!

1 Oct 1968

LCol R.L. MORTIMER succeeds LCol McKay as CO. The squadron becomes part of 10 Tactical Air Group and is redesignated as "408 Tactical Fighter Squadron. The squadron reaches a milestone – 25 years' service making it eligible to receive its Standard. The formal presentation is made in Rivers by the Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba on 20 Mar 70.

1 April 1970

The squadron is disbanded. Nine months later it re-emerges at CFB Namao, Alberta, as "408 Tactical Helicopter Squadron."

1970

- 408 Tactical Fighter Squadron, disbanded on April 1st 1970.

1971

- As a result of the Unification, RCAF Station Rivers was re-named CFB Rivers.
- CFB Rivers closed in September 1971

1972

- September 1972 the land was turned over to the Department on Indian Affairs and Northern Development for use as an industrial training centre for Manitoba Indians. The training centre was known as the Oo-Za-We-Kwun Centre.

1974

- The Rivers Gliding School, a summer Air Cadet glider camp opened at the former base in 1974, remaining until 1984, when it re-located to Gimli.

1980

- The Oo-Za-We-Kwun Centre closed and the land was sold by the Federal Government. Hangar Farms Ltd, a hog farm operation, opened at the site in 1988.

1988

- The site was purchased by Larry Friesen who opened Hangar Farms Ltd., a hog farm operation.

1990's

- The movie "For The Moment", starring Russel Crowe. Scenes of the actors standing outside their barracks were filmed at Rivers, requiring a fresh coat of green paint to be applied to the old buildings