

British Commonwealth Air Training Plan No. 1 Air Navigation School (No. 1 ANS).

WWII broke out in 1939 and construction on an air base at Rivers began shortly afterwards.

RCAF Station Rivers originally opened in May 1942 under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan as No. 1 Air Navigation School (No. 1 ANS). As the war progressed, RCAF Station Rivers also became a training centre for Army pilots and parachutists as well as flying instructors from the Army, RCN and RCAF. Additionally, the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals and the Air Dispatch School made Rivers their home.

During the war years the airport at Rivers and its facilities were used primarily by Avro Ansons for the purpose of training navigators through the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan

Crashes were frequent. Airmen from Britain, Australia and New Zealand who were killed in these crashes were buried in the Rivers Cemetery.

Canadian Joint Air Training Centre

After the war ended Rivers continued as a military base and was eventually called the "Canadian Joint Air Training Centre" or "CJATC", because all three services trained there.

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.

All military parachute training in Canada at that time took place in Rivers and Shilo.

Army Aviation Tactical Training School 1947

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. No. 6 Signal Regiment, Royal Canadian Corps of Signals and the Air Support Signals Unit provided communications duties at Camp Rivers. 444 Air Observation Post Squadron was formed on 1 October 1947, but disbanded 1 April 1949.

Joint Air Photo Interpretation School 1948 - 1960

In 1948, the Joint Air Photo Interpretation School opened at Rivers. The school closed in 1960.

Basic Helicopter Training Unit 1953 -

The Basic Helicopter Training Unit was established at Rivers in August 1953, initially to train RCAF pilots, but by 1956, Army helicopter pilots were also training at Rivers.

In the meantime, more than 450 homes were constructed at CFB Rivers for more than 2,000 military citizens. The community boasted first-class amenities, including a full hospital, dentist, two churches, a 24-room school, bowling alley, movie theatre, a full grocery store, butcher shop, auto club, gas station and a recreation centre.

Royal Canadian Sigs

They took care of communications on the base and in the field working with the airborne and the aircraft and keeping pilots informed on wind speeds on the ground, etc...

No. 1 Transport Helicopter Platoon 1963

In December 1963, No. 1 Transport Helicopter Platoon (No. 1 THP), a unit of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps, was established at RCAF Station Rivers, along with their fleet of CH-113A Voyageur transport helicopters and one CH-112 Nomad.

408 Tactical Fighter Squadron 1964 - 1970

The 408 Tactical Fighter Squadron, whose primary functions were reconnaissance and weapons delivery, moved to Rivers in 1964 from RCAF Station Rockcliffe, and remained there until disbanded on 1 April 1970.

Parachute Training

Parachute Training began at the Rivers Mock Tower and then moved to Shilo.

Base Facilities

The base's recreational facilities, with a large gymnasium, bowling alley and swimming pool were superior to those available in the town of Rivers.

Brooke School at the base, beginning in the early 1950's, enrolled students from the town, well as from CJATC.

Ski hill south of CJATC, winter 1956/57

Royal Visit

Prince Philip Royal Visit to CJATC Rivers
Autumn 1954

CFB Rivers closed in September 1971.

Non Military Use

With the Canadian military unifying in 1968 and Ottawa making budget cuts, CFB Rivers was declared surplus to defence needs and it closed in September 1971. After the base was abandoned the land and its buildings were turned over to various community uses until 1988 when it was purchased by Larry Friesen who opened Hangar Farms Ltd., a hog farm operation.

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

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.

In 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.

In the mid 1990's, the RCAF returned to the former RCAF Station Rivers, with the help of some movie magic, in the movie "For The Moment", a film about an Australian pilot who comes to Manitoba to train under the BCATP, starring Russell Crowe. While most of the movie was filmed at the Brandon Airport, 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.

Air Cadets - A Reminiscence

While attending high school in Rivers I became an air cadet, gained military experience by attending summer camps at air force bases, and was promoted to sergeant, the highest cadet rank in #320 Rivers Squadron. My older brother

Walter, as a Flying Officer with the Royal Canadian Air Force, had completed 52 air missions over the Atlantic Ocean and Europe during WWII and I admired him greatly. I had been too young to serve in the war and I felt that I had been left out of a great and exciting historical event. A military career greatly appealed to me and the Korean War would eventually give me a chance for the kind of an adventure that I had missed during WWII because of my youth.

A Reminiscence

Back in the '50s, while a member of #317 Strathclair Air Cadet Squadron for eight years, we were often bussed over to this Rivers where we were thrilled to ride in most of the aircraft shown below. The visits to the Rec Hall were a favourite because it was our first exposure to a real gymnasium. We spent many enjoyable weekends practising drill on its huge hardwood floor as well as playing volleyball, Bordenball, and other gym sports. The building also housed a bowling alley, rifle range, snack bar, and an area for films. Later, in the early '60s, while earning tuition money for university, I worked summers in the CE section painting PMQs, hangars, fuel tanks, etc. I boarded in one of the barracks through the week and but many nights I climbed onto the military shuttle bus to Brandon -- guitar slung over my shoulder -- to play with one of the country, rock or TV bands I was playing with at that time. Still later, in the late '60s, Sue-On and I performed many times in the various messes and clubs on the base.

Hillman Memories

Work on this Web page feature is long overdue. I spent many memorable hours on that base. Back in the '50s, while a member of #317 Strathclair Air Cadet Squadron for eight years, we were often bussed over to this Rivers where we were thrilled to ride in most of the aircraft shown below. The visits to the Rec Hall were a favourite because it was our first exposure to a real gymnasium. We spent many enjoyable weekends practising drill on its huge hardwood floor as well as playing volleyball, Bordenball, and other gym sports. The building also housed a bowling alley, rifle range, snack bar, and an area for films. Later, in the early '60s, while earning tuition money for university, I worked summers in the CE section painting PMQs, hangars, fuel tanks, etc. I boarded in one of the barracks through the week and but many nights I climbed onto the military shuttle bus to Brandon -- guitar slung over my shoulder -- to play with one of the country, rock or TV bands I was playing with at that time. Still later, in the late '60s, Sue-On and I performed many times in the various messes and clubs on the base.

My first helicopter flight was in this Bell 47.

A real thrill for a 14-year-old kid.

The all plexiglass cockpit made for an incredible view

and gave the sensation of floating through the air.

We landed on one of the steep drumlin-like hills outside of rivers - I think to the southwest.

I heard a few years later that the pilot had retired from the air force and gone into the lumber industry in BC where he was decapitated after landing and exiting on a steep slope.

Our cadet squadron took many rides in this aircraft

-- an experience I never looked forward to.

For much of my time in my eight years in the squadron I was a Flight Sergeant and Warrant Officer

and was expected to set an example.

However, the ride was always very noisy and rough...

and I spent every hour in this craft trying to keep from vomiting.

The most memorable ride was the trip to summer camp at St. Jean, Quebec.

Before reaching our destination, however, we lost an engine and had to make a tense forced landing at Toronto where we spent an uncomfortable night.

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