

Rivers Era

The Rivers Era 1964-1971

https://www.forfreedom.ca/?page_id=104

Feb 1964

In early February the squadron is moved to Rivers, Manitoba, where it assumes 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.

May 1965

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 late and long, 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

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 measure 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.”

<https://flightsim.to/file/35192/rcaf-tf-51d-mkiv-rivers-manitoba>

AH P-51D RCAF Canadian Joint Air Training Centre

Ex USAF P-51D-25-NA serial number 44-73422 served with USAAF 338th AAFBU in 1945. After WWII, it was delivered to the Canada Joint Air Training Centre (C.J.A.T.C.) at RCAF Rivers, Manitoba in February 1951 as part of a 150 P-51D purchase deal by the Canadian government from US surplus. Designated as a Tactical Fighter TF-51D MkIV, this Mustang was given the serial number 9287 and coded OU*287.

RCAF Rivers was No. 1 Air Navigation School, and No. 1 Central Navigation School which trained Canadian Army pilots, and pilots for the Royal Air Force. Both schools were part of No. 2 Training Command RCAF, which was one of the 4 commands responsible for administration of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP). Other post-war units stationed at Rivers included the Canadian Parachute Training Centre, the Army Aviation Tactical Training School, the Joint Air Photo Interpretation School, the Basic Helicopter Training Unit, and the Army Air Tactical Training School (AATTS).

OU*287 also went on to serve time with No. 420 Squadron (Auxiliary) at RCAF Station, Crumlin (London), Ontario. This Mustang was finally struck of charge in December 1956 as the RCAF began to phase out the Mustangs in favour of the new Sabre and Vampire jets. It was eventually sold on the civilian market being registered as both N6401D and N10539, and in 1969 was sold to the El Salvadorean Air Force. After a few years, this Mustang MkIV was repatriated to the US and last reported as N103TL with Executive Airmotive of Miami, Florida. This registration was cancelled in 2006.

<https://www.mustangsmustangs.net/p-51/survivors/serial/44-73422>

PL-3709 – Entrance at No 1 Central Navigation School, Rivers, Manitoba
(National Defence Image)





PL-3710 – View of the barracks at No 1 Central Navigation School, Rivers, Manitoba. (National Defence Image)



PL-3720 – Work parade of navigators at No 1 Air Navigation School, Rivers, Manitoba (4 June 1941) (National Defence Image)



PL-3719 – Navigators and instructors enter school – No 1 Air Navigation School,
Rivers, Manitoba (4 June 1941) (National Defence Image)