



# OUR HISTORY

## BRITISH COMMONWEALTH AIR TRAINING PLAN

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### NO. 11, SERVICE FLYING TRAINING SCHOOL YORKTON, SASKATCHEWAN

(Sources: Military history files of City of Yorkton Archives, Phil Redant's Yorkton Military History booklet, and research notes from the National Archives by Murray Straker)

In August of 1940, the announcement came that Yorkton would have a Royal Canadian Air Force station—a flying training school of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. As early as the onset of the war in 1939, Mayor Charles Peaker and other city officials were on a quest to have the Federal Government establish a flying training school near Yorkton. Liberal party candidate Allan McLean and Liberal Member of Parliament George W. McPhee promoted the plans. Their bid was successful and construction of the facilities began in the spring of 1940 on a site a few kilometres north of Yorkton, with two relief stations located nearby in the two communities of Rhein and Sturdee.

By November, the project was sufficiently advanced to allow for the first official plane to bring Air Vice Marshall G. M. Croll and his party to Yorkton for an inspection. While readying the school for the formal opening, an accident occurred. On March 28th, an Avro Anson crashed three miles east of Yorkton. The Pilot, F.O.W. Miller, was uninjured. At the same time, seven Harvards arrived from Winnipeg, with seven more arriving in April. The school opened for operation on April 10, 1941, with the official opening on June 11, of that year. It was an impressive complex consisting of 40 buildings, including

a large mess hall, a 35-bed hospital, and hangars to shelter some 200 planes. The Harvards were gradually replaced by the twin-engine Cessna Cranes in October of 1941.

The flying school created a boom for Yorkton and an opportunity for close involvement with the airmen and airwomen. Royal Australian Air Force veteran Norman McKeeman, a long time resident of Yorkton, arrived for training in December of 1942. He had nothing but praise for the welcome the airmen received in Yorkton. McKeeman, who was part of a group of eight Australians, recalls how they arrived in Canada with quite light clothing, but were soon outfitted with warmer coats to suit our winters. He was impressed with the amenities of the base; the lodgings were superior to the air force stations of his home country. A hostess club was organized with headquarters on the third floor of the city hall, which provided a diversity of social events for the military personnel and citizens. To quote researcher and author Murray Straker: "The city was blue—when the uniformed men came into town filling the streets." A yearly event endeared the men in blue to the people of the region—they assisted area farmers with the harvest.

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