

Guide to Searching Canada's Air War Chronology

General

The purpose of this Chronology is to place Canadian and Newfoundland Airmen in the events they took part in during the period of the Second World War, with all known facts about the event that can be used for further research by the reader. The main body of the Chronology is in the following files:

Canada's Air War - 1929-38
Canada's Air War - 1939
Canada's Air War - 1940
Canada's Air War - 1941
Canada's Air War - 1942
Canada's Air War - 1943
Canada's Air War - 1944
Canada's Air War - 1945

Naturally a Chronology is written in a chronological format, in this case files by Year. In the files, by Month, then by Day. Of note, to distinguish operations that took place by night these are noted by dual dates, that is:

Wednesday
16 *reference*

for day events, followed by

16-17 *reference*

for events that occurred that night.

To find an Airmen the name is given with initials and surname, as in '**J.M. Smith**'. Canadians and members of the RCAF are **highlighted in scarlet**. In some cases full names are used to separate Airmen with the same name and initials involved in events on the same day, or to clear up often made errors. As well Airwomen are sometimes identified with their full names. So if a search fails try again just using the surname.

There are several associated files to find names, sorted by Date, by Unit, by Hometown and the PoW List.

Canada's Air War - Casualties by Unit
Canada's Air War - Fatalities By Date
Canada's Air War - Fatalities and PoWs by Home Town
Canada's Air War - PoW List

The dates given for fatalities in these files is the date on the *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* registry, and any discrepancies are noted in the text.

The date is listed on those files by day, as in **March 30, 1944** for example. Once an Airman's name has been found searching the Year in the appropriate file by Name will locate the event.

For example, searching Date, Unit, Hometown or PoW list for **W.B. Anderson** will find him listed as:

F/O W.B. Anderson (bro. to J.S. & L.G Anderson) Jan. 20, 1943
of Craigmyle, Alberta, and 407 Sqn.

Searching the 1943 Chronology file will find the entry:

20 407 Sqn. Hudson V AM551 RR-C was returning from an attack on a German convoy and disappeared from radar offshore of England, F/O W.B. Anderson, F/O L.W. Birkinshaw, WO2 F.T. Mattison and Squadron Gunnery Leader F/L O.K. Middleton missing (407 SH).

Note that the information under the Date, Unit and Hometown file gives the information that F/O Anderson was one of three brothers killed in the war, and in the Chronology is information for further research, ie, the aircraft type and mark number, the aircraft serial number, it's squadron and aircraft identification side codes, the purpose of their flight, what is known of the circumstances of the loss, the members of the crew that were on this Sortie, and that they were not recovered, and a reference to a source outside of the basic books used to create the entry.

The file Canada's Air War – References has a bibliography of all the sources referenced in the files and other related material.

There are other supporting files, including a list of Commonwealth Airmen who came to Canada and lost their lives [here](#), and still remain in what is for them a foreign land.

Canada's Air War - Commonwealth Losses in Canada by Date

For example if you were interested in **S.F. Bradley** from New Zealand you would see the note in the file:

April 9, 1942 K LAC S.F. Bradley RNZAF flying accident, #10 SFTS, Dauphin, Man.

Searching the 1942 file for S.F. Bradley would give:

9 #10 SFTS, Dauphin, Manitoba, Crane I #7957 crashed near Makinak, Man., Sgt D.D. Dean RCAF (USA) and LAC S.F. Bradley RNZAF killed. See #12 SFTS loss July 25, 1942.

In cases of aircraft losses in Canada the Chronology tries to give the location of the event, for local historians and for educational purposes. A list of locations cited in North America in the text is given in the file:

Canada's Air War - Locations Referenced in Canada

and suggested projects for schools to use these can be in the file:

Canada's Air War - Proposals for Projects

There is also a guide to abbreviations used in the text, and (as noted) any reference works cited by the text.

Canada's Air War - Ranks and Abbreviations

Canada's Air War - References

In this case 'SFTS' refers to:

SFTS - Service Flying Training School, where Commonwealth pilots learned advanced flying and basic military techniques.

and (407 SH) in the first example refers to:

407 SH - *407 Squadron History*

a book, published as

anonymous, *407 Squadron History 1941-1996 - a Narrative History*, 407 Squadron, 1996.

Hints and Advanced Searches

First, it is suggested not to include a rank within a search, as Airmen are promoted. Many Airmen have more than one reference in the text as well, so an earlier mention might be missed.

In any cited event Airmen are listed by those killed, missing, injured, taken prisoner, evaded or rescued/safe, in that order where appropriate. For example from June 1944:

28-29 102 Sqn. Halifax III LW143 DY-O shot down by a night fighter over France, P/O J. Wilson, F/S N.D. Campbell RAAF and F/S N.A. Pardon RAAF killed, Sgt D.E. Leslie RAF (Can.), Sgt A.D. Eagle RAF, Sgt R.L. Leveington RAF and Sgt R.W.I. Joyce RAF initially evaded but were betrayed to the Gestapo and were sent to Buchenwald Concentration camp before being rescued by the Luftwaffe and becoming PoW. See August 20, below. Sgt Leslie was a Biggs' Boy (K. Stofer).

In the above example moving to the beginning of the nights entry will give a short account of the operation this loss occurred on, in this case:

28-29 Bomber Command sent 28 Pathfinder Lancasters leading 202 Halifax bombers to two rail yards in France, as well as 33 Mosquitos to Saarbrücken, 10 more to the oil plant at Scholven/Buer, 21 RCM, 12 GARDENING and 35 SERRATE/INTRUDER/V-1 patrols, totalling 341 sorties with the loss of 20 (BC War Diaries).

The explanation to references such as 'Bigg's Boy', 'Pathfinder' and 'GARDENING' can be found in the *Ranks and Abbreviations* file cited above.

Usually if there is supplementary information there will be a notation, such as in the example for **S.F. Bradley**, which reads "**See #12 SFTS loss July 25, 1942.**" This might refer to the Airman, or the event. In this case it refers to the discovery of a design weakness in the Crane aircraft which might have had a bearing on the loss.

If having read the example of **F/O W.B. Anderson**, above, the researcher would like to know more about his Unit the Chronology includes dates of formation, moves, changes of equipment and disbandment for Canadian Units for the period of the war. Searching the phrase '407 sqn' will bring these notes up. For 407 Sqn. beginning in May 1941:

8 **407 Sqn. RCAF formed as a Coastal Strike unit on Blenheim IV aircraft (RCAF Sqns.).**

June 1941

407 Sqn. begins to receive Hudson III and V aircraft for operations (RCAF Sqns.).

September 1941

7-8 407 Sqn. Hudson V AM556 RR-E, W/C H.M. Styles RAF makes the squadrons first offensive operation, bombing a ship off Holland (RCAF Sqns.).

October 1941

13-14 407 Sqn. sank the small dredger *Hamm 109* off Terschelling, the Squadrons first victory (I. Wikene).

November 1941

2-3 407 Sqn. Hudson, **Sgt J.W. Creeden**, sank 1 ship and other pilots damaged 4 more on the North Sea coast (I. Wikene). See Feb. 12, 1942.

30 ***In three months of operations 407 Sqn. had attacked 52 ships off Holland, scoring hits on 32 of these (407 SH). This was more than the other Coastal Command anti-shipping squadrons attacks in this period combined. A comment by an officer in Coastal Command that the Squadron was "fighting like demons" was reported, and the name "Demons" was adopted as the Squadron name (K. Abbott). The wartime book The R.C.A.F. Overseas-The First Four Years devotes an entire chapter to this Squadron's Hudson attacks on shipping off the coast of Holland.***

Squadron numbers overseas are in the format '123 Sqn.' except when a Squadron had an associated name such as '242 (Canadian) Sqn.' or '125 (Newfoundland) Sqn.', for example. Home establishment RCAF Squadrons had an associated code to identify their purpose, such as '#1 (F) Sqn.' [fighter] or '#8 (BR) Sqn.' [bomber reconnaissance, ie, coastal protection]. However RCAF Squadrons posted overseas from Canada, or to Alaska or Newfoundland, retain their RCAF designations in the text unless re-numbered.

Where an Airman serving in the RCAF was from another country it is noted in the notation 'RCAF (country)', as in case of **Sgt D.D. Dean RCAF (USA)** quoted above. Likewise Canadians in the RAF or other Air Forces are noted as 'RAF (Can.)'. It should be noted that Canada and Newfoundland were separate Dominions in this period, so this applies to Newfoundland Airmen as well.

Other events which continue over days, months or years, such as planning for an operation, famous flights, or the Great Depression, are underlined in the text, and searching that phrase will give the reader a quicker read and a sense of how the events unfolded. This especially applies to the Spanish Civil War, a long event which in many important ways affected the Second World War in the air.

There are two events which are exceptions to this, and these are the war in Russia, and the development of nuclear technology, as they are important to the Chronology but separate from the narrative of the Canadian air war. However these are also searchable by phrase (some of which use invisible text in these cases). For those interested, searching the word 'soviet' will find the references for the former, and for the latter the phrase 'nuclear' will describe the events from the discovery of Radium in Canada to the activation of the ZEEP reactor and the beginning of the Cold War.

In the files if one wants to get quickly to a certain month, these headers, such as '**July 1943**' have a double space between the month and the year. So a search for "July<space><space>1943" will take you to the start of the month. Likewise a simple "<space><space>19" search will take you through the months (particularly useful in the file for 1929-1938).

The limits of the Chronology, from 1929 to 1947, are not arbitrary. The beginning is based on the "Ten Year Rule" used by the British Treasury, the belief that England would have 10 years warning of a major European conflict and thus could divert funds from the military to other purposes (which was a serious misjudgement). The end of the year of 1947 is the date used by the *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* for fatalities caused by the war and it's aftermath.

Other events noted in the Text provide context to the time which was just as uncertain as our own, and many, such as the introduction of products, premiere of films, or the birth of famous people, are presented to give the reader of today a reference point in their own lives.

Every effort has been made in the Text to associate events involving aircraft with the serial number of the aircraft. This can help a researcher making further searches especially on the internet where including the serial number with the name can often parse out information from a larger search of just a name. These are mostly in RCAF, RAF and USAAF formats. The RCAF system was purely numeric, ranging from 2 to 5 digits in this period, and are displayed as, for example, '#12345'. The RAF uses a 5 character system that at the start of the war had a single letter followed by 4 numbers (ie, Z1234), but as more aircraft were needed became a 2 letter/3 number system (ie, AB123). In the USAAF service the first two numbers indicate the year funds were voted for the purchase, followed by a numerical number for the aircraft, for example '42-1234'.

Note that this Chronology avoids the use of personal serial numbers or given names except when establishing certain identities. In part this is due to the fact that the same Airman might have 2 serials, one as an enlisted airman and a

second as an officer, and in part to keep the Chronology simple. This information for fatalities can be found from the book that inspired the project, *They Shall Grow Not Old*, or by consulting the *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* registry on-line. As well *They Shall Grow Not Old* has the serials for most Canadian PoWs, and for Commonwealth Airmen who died in North America in it's Appendices. If you are seeking further information on an Airman from other sources (such as the www.rafcommands.com website) it is worth providing the personal serial number, if known, and given names, in your query.

Another explanation of the Chronology, it's aims, and the criteria used to produce it can be found in the last part of the *Preface* file.

I hope you find this database useful, and if so please consider a Donation to the *Ventura Memorial Flight Association* that created it, or the *Bomber Command Museum of Canada* that hosted it online.

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www.bombercommandmuseummarch1945.ca