

THE 60th ANNIVERSARY OF THE AIR CADET LEAGUE

Order in Council PC 6647 was passed November 11, 1940. This order authorized the formation of the Air Cadet League (ACL) of Canada and set forth responsibilities of the civilian body and the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). On April 9, 1941, the ACL was granted a Dominion Charter authorizing it to operate as a charitable, non-profit corporation.

Under authority of the National Defence Act, Section 46, the Canadian Forces (CF) form a partnership with the Air Cadet League of Canada, in operating and supporting a cadet movement for both male and female cadets across Canada.

The first Air Cadet Squadron under the Dominion Charter was formed in Montreal, Quebec, and was named Number 4 De Maisonneuve. By the end of 1941, there were 79 squadrons affiliated across the country. In September 1944, the movement reached its peak wartime strength of 374 squadrons, over 29,000 cadets, 1,750 officers and instructors, and another 2,000 civilians who supplied financial and other support. The Air Cadet League of Canada is therefore celebrating its 60th year of operations under the Dominion Charter.

However....., that's not the end of the story, or even the beginning!

Air Cadet training in Canada actually pre-dates the granting of the Dominion Charter, through the formation of 1601 Wing in Vancouver.

"A Vancouver businessman who gained fame and honour for his flying exploits in World War 1, is father of Canada's fast-growing Air Cadet Corps, nearly 170 of whose original members are now serving with the RCAF. He is Squadron Leader A. W. "Nick" Carter, MBE, DSC, vice-president of the Air Cadet League of Canada.

"In 1938, Carter was asked to head an Air Cadet unit here that would serve as a sort of guinea pig

for the Dominion. Squadron Leader A. D. Bell-Irving, MC, OC of 111 (CAC) Squadron RCAF, was a member of the former Air Advisory Council which had been con-sidering the idea for some time. Bell-Irving was so keen about it, and was so insistent that a start be made, that Vancouver was selected for the try out." (Vancouver Sun, Thursday, June 17, 1943)

Squadron Leader Bell-Irving's personal diary details the efforts he made in convincing S/L Carter to take the position and within two weeks an enrolment parade attracted "about 1,000 boys" at the Horse Show Building (later to become the Stanley Park Armouries). Newspaper accounts place the number at only 700, still a remarkable achievement, and evidence that differing opinions of the numbers on parade has been a fact of Air Cadet life for a very long time!!



S/L A. W. "Nick" Carter

Not everyone approved of the formation of an Air Cadet Corps, and the diaries tell of Bell-Irving's "tangle" with the army establishment and the difficulty in obtaining uniforms. S/L Carter was intent on putting forward a smart-looking unit for the proposed visit of His Majesty King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, scheduled for May 29th, 1939.

"Once again, Duncan Bell-Irving went to bat for the Air Force Cadets, and with the help of Hon. E. W. Hamber, then Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, and Hon. Ian MacKenzie, then minister of national defence, the boys were provided with some obsolete RCAF uniforms." (Ibid.)

In fact, after months of pleadings, the uniforms arrived only days before the royal visit, after the

Hon. Ian MacKenzie had prevailed upon His Majesty to inspect the Air Cadets while wearing his RAF uniform. Thus, shortage of uniforms also appears to be an age-old problem!

The newly formed 1601 Wing, under the capable command of Squadron Leader Carter, continued to impress government officials, including “Billy” Bishop, VC, and Hon. C. G. Power, Minister of Defence, and both were persuaded by Carter’s passion for a Dominion-wide expansion. Mr. Power suggested that an Air Cadet League be organized to provide the necessary civilian support.

“From the small beginnings here in Vancouver, the Air Cadet Corps has spread across Canada,

and today is 21,000 strong with an objective of 35,000.” (Ibid.)

And where are they now?

Once the Dominion Charter for the new Air Cadet League was granted in 1941, Squadron Leader Carter selected the number 111 due to their association with 111 Auxiliary Squadron, RCAF.

Over the years, 111 Squadron merged with #57 and #59 Squadrons (who had earlier merged to form #753 Neptune Squadron), and with #5 Squadron, a then-unauthorized girl’s unit. Throughout these changes, they retained the historic number, and today they parade as 111 Pegasus Squadron at Bessborough Armouries in Vancouver.

Which is why B.C. is called, “The Birthplace of Air Cadets.”



“Group Captain E. C. Luke inspects Penticton Squadron #259. Third from the left is seen Squadron Leader A. W. Carter of Vancouver, a pioneer of the movement.” [1943 Archives]