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ITEM	WORD LIMIT*	DETAILS
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR	50–250	Commentary on any portion of a previous <i>RCAFJ</i> .
ARTICLES	3000–5000	Written in academic style.
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POINTS OF INTEREST	250–1000	Information on any topic (including operations, exercises and anniversaries) that is of interest to the broader aerospace audience.
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POINT/COUNTERPOINT	1500–2000	Forum to permit a specific issue of interest to the RCAF to be examined from two contrasting points of view.

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“To Bring About the Ultimate Transition”:

**The USAAF's 1944–45 Scheme to
Re-Equip RCAF Bomber Squadrons
for Service in the Pacific***

By Peter Rayls



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In the autumn of 1944, it was becoming apparent that the defeat of the Axis powers in Europe was all but inevitable. The Allies had successfully retaken much of France and Italy, while the Soviet Union continued to press into Eastern Europe.¹ Given the Allies' agreement to fight the Germany-first strategy, Canadian and American leaders unsurprisingly started thinking about the expected shift in priority and resources from the European theatre of operations to the Pacific theatre of operations.² Officials from both countries also began to consider the post-war world and its impacts on the bilateral relationship.

In November 1944, officials from the United States State Department and the USAAF began discussing a plan to transition Royal Canadian Air Force bomber squadrons from Europe to the Pacific.

In November 1944, officials from the United States (US) State Department and the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) began discussing a plan to transition Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) bomber squadrons from Europe to the Pacific. Under this plan, the US would re-equip these squadrons with American-made bombers and integrate them into USAAF formations. These officials hoped that this plan would serve two purposes. First, this would give the USAAF additional forces to use in its bombing campaign against the Japanese in preparation for a potential invasion of Japan's home islands. Second, USAAF planners, including Major General Laurence Kuter, felt that this plan had "considerable merit and is in line with the USAAF long-range policy to get all countries of the Western Hemisphere to standardize on United States aviation equipment."³ Henry Stimson, the US Secretary of War, seconded this idea in a letter to the US Secretary of State, Edward Stettinius. Stimson viewed the plan as "an opportunity . . . to bring about the *ultimate transition* [emphasis added] of the RCAF from British to

American equipment should this be the desire of the Canadian Government."⁴ Although this plan never advanced beyond planning and informal consultations, it is important to study because it highlights American desires to cultivate post-war collaboration with the RCAF. It also demonstrates American willingness to take Canadian political concerns into account. And it stresses American, especially USAAF, preferences for informal and personal methods of interacting with Canadian partners—methods that would become routine as Canadian and American air force officers collaborated during the Cold War.

It is important to consider that this plan ran counter to the predominant assumption at the time that the RCAF would contribute to the war in the Pacific as part of the Royal Air Force's (RAF) Tiger Force. That said, in November 1944, Canada and the RCAF were still actively working to define what the latter's role in the Pacific would be. While the easy option would be for the RCAF to work within Tiger Force, the RCAF's poor working relationship with the RAF during the Second World War and its desire to operate as an independent air force had officials in Ottawa considering the possibility of operating with the USAAF.⁵ It is safe to assume that officials from the US Embassy in Ottawa, along with USAAF officers who had met and talked with RCAF officers, would have had knowledge of the RCAF's troubles with the RAF and its willingness to consider options outside of the RAF in November 1944.

In January 1945, senior USAAF leaders General Henry "Hap" Arnold and Major General Muir "Santy" Fairchild gave their approval to proceed with the plan's development. It appeared to hinge on Arnold selling the arrangement to Air Marshal Robert Leckie, the RCAF's Chief of the Air

Staff, during a January 1945 trip to Washington, DC, to discuss “bases.”⁶ While a January 4, 1945, letter between US officials J. Graham Parsons and John Hickerson was not specific about which bases the officers would discuss, one could reasonably presume that this referred to USAAF facilities in Canada. However, it is also possible that they planned to discuss possible bases for the RCAF to operate from in the Pacific. For reasons unknown, Arnold was unable to discuss the bomber plan with Leckie during their meeting.⁷ It is evident though that State Department officials understood the urgency of the matter. In a later letter between Parsons and Hickerson, Parsons argued that any American plan would need to be in place before the RCAF and the RAF had firmed up plans for Tiger Force. Parsons sensibly maintained that the RCAF would not want to use American equipment if they were operating within an RAF formation.⁸ Parsons also understood that re-equipping the RCAF would go hand-in-hand with the RCAF’s inclusion in a USAAF formation.

Records maintain that Ray Atherton, the American ambassador to Canada, discussed the idea with Leckie after his January trip and convinced him to make a second trip to Washington to further discuss the plan.⁹ Leckie made a short-notice trip to Washington for this purpose in March 1945. When he arrived, Arnold was out of town and unable to meet with Leckie. Major General Robert L. Walsh was tasked to meet with Leckie in Arnold’s place. Clumsily, Walsh was not fully read in on the plan nor the USAAF’s intent to supply the RCAF with the USAAF’s latest bombers (most likely B-29s). While the USAAF considered Walsh a “Western Hemispheric” expert, his expertise focused primarily on Latin America and not Canada. Additionally, available documents suggest that Walsh and Leckie had no previous relationship or interactions that would give them a basis from which to hold such a delicate conversation. The meeting between Walsh and Leckie plainly bombed in part because Walsh offered to supply the RCAF squadrons with Douglas DB-7 Boston medium bombers, which Leckie justifiably viewed as dated, second-rate aircraft.¹⁰ This faux pas suggests that Walsh was ignorant of ongoing issues between the RCAF and the RAF, especially the RCAF’s perception that the RAF habitually and consciously gave the RCAF second-rate aircraft and equipment.¹¹

The meeting went so poorly that a conference was convened that included Fairchild, Kuter and Walsh from the USAAF and Parsons and Atherton from the State Department. Kuter and Walsh decided that they should go to Ottawa to smooth things over with Leckie and to offer him the latest USAAF bombers. While Kuter was ultimately unable to go, Walsh, personally flying a B-17, made the trip to Ottawa in April 1945. While his diplomatic efforts were well received by Leckie, it became clear by June that the plan was going nowhere.¹² This was a result, in part, of the delay stemming from Walsh and Leckie’s disastrous initial meeting that came on top of other delays in getting the plan moving. It is also clear that American officials began to fear the negative impact that the deal might have on



The Douglas A-20 Havoc (company designation DB-7).

US / United Kingdom (UK) relations.¹³ In the end, American officials cancelled the rearmament scheme largely over fears that the diplomatic risks outweighed the long-term military benefits.¹⁴ One should also not discount that, by June 1945, the war in the Pacific was beginning to look like it might end earlier than expected. The US was in the process of finishing its campaign to conquer Okinawa, US strategic bombers were relentlessly attacking Japan's home islands and the Truman administration had also secretly made its initial decision to utilize atomic weapons against Japan.¹⁵

While the American plan to integrate the RCAF into the USAAF focused primarily on attempting to win the war against Japan, it also demonstrates that some USAAF leaders were beginning to think about the post-war world. One of the aspirations for these leaders included continued—if not increased—collaboration with the RCAF. The USAAF's plan shows that its leaders viewed the standardization of equipment as one of the key vehicles for bilateral collaboration. As the Cold War progressed, air defence leaders from both Canada and the US would continually emphasize the need for standardized equipment to improve the ability of both air forces to operate together.¹⁶ USAAF leaders, especially Robert Walsh, also viewed the bomber scheme as a way to create personal relationships between Canadian and American officers, which he felt would be useful for post-war cooperation.¹⁷ The American leaders attempting to initiate this plan also understood that a key component to successful collaboration and standardization had to include collaboration in a way that would be politically and fiscally palatable to civilian leaders in Ottawa. This was in contrast to the conflicts that Canadian civilian and air force leaders encountered with the RAF during the Second World War.

American leaders understood that Ottawa would never approve the spending of funds to pay full price for American bombers. This problem was exacerbated by Ottawa's policy of refusing anything that could be interpreted as aid from the US. American understanding of these conflicting issues seems to have been centred primarily at the State Department, especially within its British Commonwealth Section and the US Embassy in Ottawa. However, these officials also seemed keen to guide and educate their military counterparts. This was demonstrated when State Department officials scotched a USAAF suggestion that the US give Canada the bombers via the Lend-Lease programme. State Department officials were quick to point out that this would not work due to Ottawa's refusal to accept Lend-Lease aid.¹⁸ This meant that American officials would have to determine a way to either reduce the cost of the bombers to a level that fit into Ottawa's budget or give them to Canada in a way that would allow Ottawa to claim that the bombers were not "aid" from America.¹⁹

This was an issue that United States Air Force (USAF) leaders would tackle in the 1950s with the cost-sharing agreement that funded the construction of the Pinetree radar system.²⁰ This issue would arise again in 1961 with the "Triangular" agreement, in which USAF provided the RCAF with F-101B Voodoo interceptors in return for Canada taking control of the staffing and costs of a larger portion of the Pinetree radar line as well as Canadair making Lockheed F-104 Starfighters for Canada and the European market.²¹ In each of these cases, American leaders understood that successful collaboration with the RCAF included attention to Ottawa's politically driven fiscal concerns. Additionally, these cases also demonstrated an ability of the State Department and American air force leaders to work together towards a common objective with regards to Canada and the RCAF.

American officials were also aware that they would need to be politically sensitive in enacting this plan. They understood that attempting to supplant the UK and the RAF as Canada and the RCAF's primary partner was a diplomatically risky proposition for both US/Canadian and US/UK relations. Walsh would display his sensitivities in his efforts to repair the harm caused by his failed meeting with Leckie in March 1945. Walsh originally planned to visit Ottawa during the first week of April. However, he delayed his trip by a week after consulting with the US Embassy

in Ottawa. They informed him that his original plan would have coincided with a previously scheduled trip to Ottawa by senior RAF leaders, who would be there to celebrate the ending of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. Walsh understood that his presence could have been awkward, and RCAF leaders would have been understandably busy and hesitant to discuss a deal for the RCAF to receive American bombers.²²

American leaders also understood that there would need to be coordination between Washington and Ottawa on how they would publicly announce any plan to have RCAF squadrons receive American bombers and be attached to the USAAF in the Pacific. Leaders in the War Department suggested that Canada should make a public request to help facilitate reaching a financing deal on the bombers. J. Graham Parsons from the State Department countered that Ottawa would never publicly raise the issue for fear of the impact on its relationship with the UK and potential political consequences at home.²³ Once again, these are issues that American and Canadian planners and leaders would continue to tackle in the 1950s and 1960s, such as when members of the US-Canada Permanent Joint Board on Defence (PJBD) agreed that it was politically best to have the PJBD's Canadian members introduce the recommendation that would allow American jets to enter Canadian airspace to intercept unknown aircraft if the RCAF were unable to make the intercept.²⁴

The American realization of Canada's political concerns speaks directly to the methods that American leaders used in dealing with this plan and the goals that they hoped to accomplish. This episode highlights an American preference—especially within the USAAF and later the USAF—to use informal methods when collaborating with their Canadian partners. The scheme to rearm RCAF bomber squadrons may not have gone beyond the planning phase, but documents suggest that American officials always planned to use informal methods to implement the plan. “Any transition has to be accomplished piecemeal, informally and gradually.”²⁵ It is clear that Ray Atherton's initial discussions with Canadian leaders were held informally. Besides Atherton's efforts, Lewis Clark, also at the US Embassy in Ottawa, held informal discussions with Herbert Gordon, Canada's Deputy Minister for Air, in May 1945. Clark and Gordon obviously developed a relationship that was trusting enough for Gordon to share his understanding “that there was considerable resentment in the RCAF that the Pacific operations were to be done in the RAF theatre of operations. RCAF personnel had operated with both the RAF and the American Air Force in the European theatre and they found the Americans much more to their liking.”²⁶ This quote is important for a couple of reasons. First, it highlights the level of trust that existed between some Canadian and American officials. Second, it emphasizes the fact that American officials were aware of the RCAF's dissatisfaction with its relationship with the RAF as well as the RCAF's growing preference to operate with the USAAF. The latter fact seemed to be a motivating factor in the USAAF's push to realign the RCAF from the RAF to the USAAF.

USAAF leaders clearly considered personal relationships to be important both in this situation and moving forward. As mentioned earlier, Walsh and other American leaders saw the bomber scheme as a way to create relationships that would pay dividends in the post-war period. This is indicative of the State Department and USAAF's understanding that there were RCAF officers who desired a realignment from the RAF to the USAAF. “That the prospects for integration of Canadian equipment with that of the United States Armed Forces was promising in the air force in view of

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the *realistic and forward looking attitude of the younger group who dominated the RCAF* [emphasis added].²⁷ It is unfortunate, but understandable, that the documents do not identify the “younger group” of RCAF officers.

In a letter to Ray Atherton, Edward T. Wailes, the chief of the State Department’s British Commonwealth Section in June 1945, conveyed thoughts articulated by Walsh: “He thought that *personal contacts* with officers who would be running our Air Corps in a few years’ time should be made *now* so that over the long term we could build a basis of *friendly relations* and cooperation with the RCAF [all emphasis added].”²⁸ It is not an understatement that this idea would form the basis of USAF/RCAF collaboration throughout the second half of the 1940s and into the 1950s when considering the cooperation between the two air forces in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD).

To this end, Walsh floated the idea of a second trip to Ottawa in June 1945. He wanted to take Brigadier General Lauris Norstad to “spend a day or so in Ottawa and have *informal, off-the-record talks* with a few of the top Canadian Air Force people [emphasis added].”²⁹ Walsh expressed concerns that Norstad, who had recently replaced Kuter as the USAAF’s chief plans officer, needed “educating, however, in differentiating between Canadians and British, as he, like many others, seems to think solely in terms of the RAF.”³⁰ Considering the difficulties that Walsh encountered in his first meeting with Robert Leckie, one wonders if Walsh had made the same mistake, learned from his misstep and wanted to pass along that learning to a fellow officer. Walsh’s suggestion came at the point in which the State Department had largely given up on a scheme to rearm RCAF bomber squadrons. Ambassador Atherton was opposed to the trip because he was concerned that any further trips might have negative consequences for the larger bilateral relationship.³¹ Wailes opposed the trip because it looked too much like a “junket.” Norstad did not help Wailes’s opinion of the trip when he stated: “And I hope there will be some good fishing.”³²

Walsh’s suggested second trip to Ottawa and Norstad’s reaction to the idea not only highlights the importance that USAAF leaders placed in the creation of personal relationships, but it also highlights American air force officers’ fondness for outdoor pursuits. They had a well-established affection for outdoor hobbies like hunting and fishing. They were often keen to create time when officially visiting Canada to enjoy the outdoors. Kuter would relate a story about an extended layover in Newfoundland with Generals George Marshal and Henry Arnold while returning from a tour of Europe following the Normandy invasions in July 1944. The American base commander, Colonel H. H. Maxwell, took the three generals fishing outside of Stephenville, much to the delight of Kuter, an avid outdoorsman.³³ During the Cold War, these hobbies would form a basis for Canadian and American air force officers to connect with each other on a personal level. This would be best seen starting in the mid-1950s when the RCAF began hosting American military leaders each summer at its Eagle River fishing camp near RCAF Station Goose Bay.³⁴ Kuter, among others, would attend the Eagle River camp in 1959 and 1960 as the Commander-in-Chief of NORAD.³⁵

The informal methods used in the USAAF’s bomber scheme also underscore the important roles that individuals performed in this scheme. American air force leaders involved in this episode would play direct roles in establishing a strong relationship between the RCAF and USAF in the following two decades. This only lends weight to Walsh’s 1945 dictum on the importance of building personal relationships. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Kuter would rise in rank to General and would become NORAD’s second commander in 1959. Working with Air Marshal C. Roy Slemon, Kuter would help cement a North American air defence culture during NORAD’s early years. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Walsh would serve as the USAF’s representative on the PJBD. In this role, he would help advance collaboration between the USAF and RCAF, which

would help create an environment for cooperation between the air forces' air defence commands. Norstad would reach the rank of general and serve as the Commander-in-Chief of the United States Air Force in Europe, the Air Deputy to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and then Supreme Allied Commander Europe. Throughout the 1950s, Norstad would work with notable RCAF officers, including Hugh Campbell, Slemon, C. R. Dunlap and Frank Miller. The latter would serve as the Vice-Deputy Air to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (working immediately under Norstad while he was the Air Deputy). In January 1963, Norstad would give a press conference in Ottawa in which he criticized Prime Minister Diefenbaker for vacillating on whether he would allow the RCAF's No. 1 Air Division to be armed with nuclear weapons. Some historians have cited Norstad's press conference as one of the key events in the fall of the Diefenbaker government in 1963.³⁶ Miller, the Chair of the Chiefs of Staff Committee at the time, was also in attendance at the press conference.

The American attempt to re-equip RCAF bomber squadrons with American-made bombers and to have those squadrons serve within the USAAF's Pacific forces in the late stages of the Second World War was an idealistic plan that—it was hoped—would simultaneously accomplish several goals. These officials hoped that these squadrons would reinforce the USAAF's strategic-bombing capability against Japan while also beginning a process of realigning the RCAF from an RAF sphere of influence to a USAAF sphere of influence. Additionally, USAAF leaders hoped that this plan would be a step towards increasing interoperability within the Western Hemisphere. While this plan ultimately petered out, it is instructive in demonstrating some of the earliest attempts by the USAAF to deepen its ties with the RCAF. This plan, the thinking behind it and the informal methods used are indicative of the collaboration that would develop between the USAF and RCAF during the Cold War. This plan also demonstrates the willingness of American air force officers to consider political and fiscal concerns in Ottawa in a way that would help smooth the path for the two air forces to work together. Ultimately, this mindset would help lay the groundwork for later bilateral cooperation seen in both NATO and NORAD.

Peter Rayls is a PhD candidate in Canadian Military History at Queen's University. His current project examines how personal and professional relationships between Canadian and American Air Force officers influenced the creation of NORAD and its unique military culture. He holds a bachelor's degree in Military History from the US Military Academy and a master's in History from Ohio State University. His previous research projects have examined Australia's role in the Vietnam War, the US Senate's reaction to the early years of the Korean War and the role of conservative American politicians in promoting air power during the early Cold War years. He spent thirteen years as a commissioned officer in the US Army. He held positions including tank platoon leader and personnel services detachment commander. He is a graduate of the US Army's Command and General Staff College. He also spent three years teaching US history at the US Military Academy.

ABBREVIATIONS

MS	manuscript
PJBD	Permanent Joint Board on Defence
RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
RG	record group
USAAF	United States Army Air Forces

NOTES

1. Geoffrey Parker, ed., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare: The Triumph of the West, Revised and Updated* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 329–31; and Robert A. Doughty et al., *Warfare in the Western World, Vol. II: Military Operations since 1871* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1996), 792–96.
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4. Henry L. Stimson to Edward R. Stettinius Jr., January 29, 1945, RG 59 State Department Files, PJBD, Box #5, File P.J.B.D. 1945, US National Archives and Records Administration.
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7. Stimson to Stettinius, January 29, 1945; and J. Graham Parsons to John D. Hickerson, February 2, 1945, RG 59 State Department Files, PJBD, Box #5, File P.J.B.D. 1945, US National Archives and Records Administration.
8. Parsons to Hickerson, February 2, 1945.
9. J. Graham Parsons, “Memorandum for File,” April 6, 1945, RG 59 State Department Files, PJBD, Box #5, File PJBD 1945, US National Archives and Records Administration.
10. Parsons, “Memorandum for File.” By the time of Walsh and Leckie’s meeting, some RCAF bomber squadrons were already flying AVRO Lancaster heavy bombers, some built in Canada.
11. Greenhous et al., *The Crucible of War*, 93.
12. Ray Atherton to E. T. Wailes, “Personal and Confidential,” June 8, 1945, RG 59 State Department Files, PJBD, Box #5, File P.J.B.D. 1945, US National Archives and Records Administration.
13. J. Graham Parsons, “RCAF Participation in the Pacific War,” June 13, 1945, RG 59 State Department Files, PJBD, Box #5, File P.J.B.D. 1945, US National Archives and Records Administration.

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16. This idea aligns with the current concept of "interoperability." C. J. England, "Air and Space Interoperability Council and the RCAF" (Master of Defence Studies paper: Canadian Forces College, 2016).
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