

Time Capsule

January 2022

The RCAF and Korea

There has been much focus on the Canadian Army and its participation in the Korean War, however both the Royal Canadian Air Force and the Royal Canadian Navy contributed significantly.

The RCAF's contribution consisted of 1,000 personnel and aircraft primarily transport.

The Canadian contribution to the air effort began in the early stages of the war when No. 426 Transport Squadron, RCAF, was attached to the US Military Air Transport Service.

By June 1954, when this assignment ended, this unit had flown 600 round trips over the Pacific, carrying more than 13,000 passengers and 3,000,000 kilograms of mail and freight without loss.

426 Squadron made round-trip flights between McChord Air force base in the USA and Haneda airfield in Tokyo while working with the USAF's Material Air transport Service.

RCAF fighter logbooks show that 20 percent of all combat missions including MiG aircraft "kills" by Canadian Sabre pilots in Korea were flown in Canadian built sabre.

In November 1950, the first RCAF combatant Flight Lieutenant Omer Levesque spent one year exchange duty with the United States Air Force. I met Omer in 1999, during the last RCAF reunion in Ottawa and had a long conversation with him at the Aviation Museum in front of a sabre. Omer was also credited with spotting the German pocket

battleship dash through the English channel just before he was shot down and picked up by the Germans in 1941.

RCAF fighter pilots served for six months or 50 combat missions whichever came first. They flew with the USAF's 4<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing and the 51<sup>st</sup>.

A combat mission normally consisted of flying about 322 km over enemy territory to the famous "MiG Alley" near the Chinese border. A round trip mission normally took 90 minutes, 30 minutes to MiG Alley on drop tanks and 60 minutes on internal fuel tanks.

The combat missions were hectic and demanding, double-missions days were frequent and there were some triple-mission days. It is estimated 75 percent of MiG "kills" were across the Yalu River which really impeded the communist offensive. There were no Canadian fatalities, however Squadron Leader Andy Mackenzie had to eject during a mission and was a PoW Time Capsule Jan 22 RCAF in Korea for two years.

The RCAF pilots accounted for nearly 900 combat missions with nine MiG "kills", two "probable's", and ten damaged. Twenty-two fighter pilots and a number of technical officers served with the US Fifth Air Force.

RCAF pilots received eight U.S. DFC and ten U.S. Air Medals. Of note, this number would have been higher except for a strange rule imposed by the Canadian Military directing that only one U.S. medal could be awarded to each Canadian serving member.