

Restoring the Historic Designations : the Royal Canadian Navy, the Canadian Army, and the Royal Canadian Air Force

The Canadian Forces (CF) are restoring the historic names the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), the Canadian Army (CA), and the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). Since February 1, 1968, the names for the sea, air, and land elements of the CF have been known as Maritime Command, Land Force Command, and Air Command.

By restoring the historic identities of the three former services, the CF are also restoring an important and recognizable part of military heritage. These were the names under which Canadians fought and emerged victorious from the First World War, the Second World War, and from Korea, under which they contributed to deterrence and defence of Europe and North America from the early days of the Cold War. These were also the names under which Canadians served on the first international peacekeeping missions.

The renaming of these former services will not impact the *Canadian Forces Reorganization Act* established in 1968. The CF will remain a unified military; in no way will the change to the names diminish capabilities or compromise operational effectiveness.

The Canadian Forces Reorganization Act (1968)

On February 1, 1968, the *Canadian Forces Reorganization Act* (Bill C-243, informally referred to as the “Unification Act”) came into effect, and amended the *National Defence Act* to unify the Royal Canadian Navy, the Canadian Army, and the Royal Canadian Air Force as part of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). As of that day, the historic names of the three branches of the CAF disappeared. The abolition of the historic identities of the three branches of the CAF was unnecessary in terms of the integration and unification of the Armed Forces. Indeed, the restoration of these historic identities, as is now being undertaken, is in keeping with the terms of the *Canadian Forces Reorganization Act*.

The History of CF Environmental Names

Sea:

The *Naval Service Act* was proposed in the House of Commons in January 1910, and became law on May 4, 1910, establishing the Naval Service of Canada. On January 30th, 1911, the Government of Canada, under Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier, officially requested the designation of “Royal” for the Canadian navy from the United Kingdom. The decision took place during the Imperial Defence Conference (a conference that settled the issue of jurisdiction of the Dominion Navies) which coincided with the Coronation of His Majesty King George V in June 1911.

The letter announcing the bestowing of the “Royal” designation was dispatched from the Colonial Office in London, and dated August 16, 1911. It was received by His Excellency

Albert Henry George Grey, Governor-General to the Government of Canada on August 29, 1911. The awarding of the “Royal Canadian Navy” title was accepted as a great honour by Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier, as he believed it was a major step in Canada’s growing autonomy.

With the passing of the *Canadian Forces Reorganization Act* on February 1, 1968, which unified all commands of the CF, the RCN ceased to exist. The naval component of the CF was renamed the “Canadian Forces Maritime Command.”

Land:

Although the term “Canadian Army” had been used informally for years, the CA was only officially called by that name from 1940. Before that time, the militia included full-time regular and part-time units, and were the land forces acting in Canada’s defence. The *Militia Act* of 1855 was an attempt to professionalize these forces and rely less on British Regulars for continental defence, although this did not change significantly until after Confederation in 1867.

In 1914, the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) was created and deployed to fight overseas in the First World War. In 1917, following its victory at Vimy Ridge, the Canadian Corps of four divisions came to be commanded by a Canadian general, Sir Arthur Currie, until it was demobilized upon the cessation of the conflict. In the Second World War, after Canada had independently declared war in September of 1939, the nation’s land forces underwent a significant reorganization, culminating in the 1940 titling of the Canadian Army (Overseas), the Canadian Army (Active) the Canadian Army (Reserve). Canada again demobilized its expeditionary force when the war ended, but the Regular Force and Reserve Force were known as army units until *The Canadian Forces Reorganization Act* came into effect.

In February of 1968, Force Mobile Command (FMC) was stood up and the Canadian Army ceased to exist. Although their official title is now Land Force Command (LFC), and has been for quite some time, the “army” has always been the colloquial term referring to Canada’s land forces. The Army was never given the prefix “Royal” as this honour is bestowed on individual Army units.

Air:

His Majesty King George V bestowed the “Royal” designation on the Canadian Air Force in 1923 but the title only became official when “The King’s Regulations and Orders” were promulgated on April 1, 1924.

Under the new organization, the RCAF was to be administered by a director responsible to the Chief of the General Staff. The RCAF was separated into three components: an Active (permanent) Air Force, an Auxiliary (part-time) Air Force and a non-active Reserve. The authorized establishment of the active air force on the day of the RCAF’s birth was a modest 68 officers and 307 airmen; the actual strength was 61 officers and 262 airmen. The dark blue

uniform and insignia of the CAF was now replaced by the sky blue RCAF uniform patterned after the RAF uniform. The insignia, ensign and badges were similar to those of the Royal Air Force. “*Sic Itur Ad Astra*” gave way to the RCAF motto “*Per Ardua Ad Astra*” (through adversity to the stars).

In February 1968, the 45,000 officers, men and women of the RCAF, including 19 types of aircraft and support material, were incorporated into the single Canadian Armed Forces. This transformation initially fragmented the RCAF and the change from the air force blue to the CAF green uniform and to different rank titles was viewed with dismay by many personnel. RCAF headquarters was disbanded and air activities were carried out by a number of functional components. For example, support to land forces was performed by tactical air units under Land Force Command (Army). Maritime Command (Navy) took over functional control of coastal and embarked aircraft. Although the Army and the Navy retained their headquarters, the Air Force was left without a central authority until the establishment of Air Command in 1975.

The “Royal” Designation

Many Commonwealth nations use the “Royal” designation for their military forces. These include Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, the Bahamas, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, St. Lucia and, of course, the United Kingdom.

Restoring the historical titles of the three former commands is an important way to recognize the CF’s history and aligns Canada with other key Commonwealth countries, whose militaries continue to use the “Royal” designation.

The Royal designation is used for many units of the CF, including:

- Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery;
- The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada;
- Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians);
- Royal 22e Régiment;
- The Royal Canadian Dragoons;
- The Royal Canadian Hussars (Montreal);
- The Royal Canadian Regiment;
- The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (Wentworth Regiment);
- The Royal Highland Fusiliers of Canada;
- The Royal Montreal Regiment;
- The Royal New Brunswick Regiment;
- The Royal Newfoundland Regiment;
- The Royal Regiment of Canada;
- The Royal Regina Rifles;
- The Royal Westminster Regiment;
- The Royal Winnipeg Rifles;
- Royal Military College of Canada; and

Royal Military College St-Jean.

The Royal designation is also used by other national institutions of Canada that include the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Royal Canadian Mint and the Royal Canadian Legion.