



# *Kestrel Publications*

## **RCAF Post Second World War Unit Codes**

The postwar Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) aircraft numbering system grew into a confusing jumble of numbers and letters along with other markings and colours. The preferred system changed several times in course of few short years. Consequently aircraft often flew around wearing old markings mixed with the new. To aircraft spotters this was a constant challenge—keeping lists updated, and photographing as many schemes as possible. For maintenance officers, however, the Air Force Headquarters' (AFHQ) periodic changes in marking standards must have been a nightmare.

To begin, soon after the war, Air Force Headquarters (AFHQ) was assigning squadrons and units 3-letter codes, a system borrowed from the Royal Air Force. The first two letters identified a *Norseman*, *Harvard*, *Mitchell*, etc. as from a particular flying unit and/or station.<sup>1</sup> The third identified the individual aircraft. From May 1947 onward, the prefix "VC" was applied—which was the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) symbol for the RCAF.<sup>2</sup> These codes and call signs were then documented in a RCAF manual labelled as "CAP 8". But since ICAO's system was not adopted universally, Canada later dropped the "VC" and "VG" codes as of November 1951.

The "VC" system used a lot of paint and time as each RCAF aircraft that was transferred between units had to be re-registered and repainted. When the system was discontinued, the RCAF reverted to only three letters being applied, with the first two letters representing the squadron, and the third letter representing individual aircraft within that squadron. There were also some changes for individual squadron codes during this changeover that meant duplicates appeared. Additionally, some codes appear to have been redistributed / re-used as units were created, disbanded or consolidated.

In 1958, AFHQ made another fleet-wide change and Individual unit codes started to disappear. Instead three numerical digits were used to denote individual aircraft preceded by the acronym "RCAF" on the side. Naturally, there were hundreds of exceptions before the new markings were instituted. Meanwhile, Air Transport Command (ATC) preferred to spell out "Royal Canadian Air Force". For a brief period Air Defence Command (ADC) did the same with *Voodoos*.

With the forces unification in the late 1960s, a host of other markings and colour schemes have come and gone. For many years, Canada flew prominently "bilingual" aircraft when Ottawa obliged its air force to be politically correct and even painting "Sauvetage" in lieu of "Rescue" on its Search and Rescue (SAR) aircraft. In addition, it was decided to standardize the numbering / designation and naming system for all the existing aircraft in the inventory; ( i.e. the Beech 18 Expeditor became the "CT-128" and the "DC-3" became the "CC-129", etc.). Of course, all this required yet another repainting of the fleet. With all of these changes, individual unit / squadron codes completely disappeared. Instead, individual aircraft were more often painted with unit colours and, in some cases, with unit crests or badges.

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<sup>1</sup> NB- There does not appear to be any correlation between this first post-war coding system and that of the previous wartime coding systems.

<sup>2</sup> The ICAO system used the prefix "VG" for aircraft of the Royal Canadian Navy.

The current RCAF carries on this previous Canadian Forces approach with no further institution of codes for unit or squadron designations. Individual aircraft especially painted to commemorate special events or displaying squadron colours have also become the norm.

In 2001, Larry Milberry of CANAV books attempted to develop an accurate list of post-war RCAF unit codes reaching 124 different codes being listed. The first time such a list had appeared was in the 1977 Griffin-Kostenuk book, *RCAF Squadrons and Aircraft*— with just 55 codes. Author Patrick Martin expanded on this list and noted some minor differences between the VC and subsequent era codes.

The decades that have past have made it more difficult than ever to understand all the various codes and pinpoint their precise significance. To make it even more confusing, as mentioned previously, some codes were re-used or more than one code was assigned to the same unit. Many of the missing codes appear to be smaller misc units, commands that were sometimes only briefly on strength in the post-war consolidations. Additionally, many of the RCAF stations and even headquarters had small numbers of aircraft assigned as “flights” to allow for flying to retain currency by desk officers or for miscellaneous requirements. For all of these reasons, consequently the further updated listing (184 codes) below must be described as still “a work in progress”:

### **RCAF Postwar Unit Codes**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Sqn # or Station</b>	<b>Typical Types / Date / Additional Notes</b>
<b>AA</b>	400 (F)	Harvard, Vampire, 1947-51
<b>AB (1st)</b>	401 (F)	Harvard, Sabre, Vampire / 1947-51
<b>AB (2nd)</b>	n/a	Otter - the first five aircraft in March 1953 were painted for publicity photos only prior to actual Sqn delivery; no correlation to 401 Sqn
<b>AC, MT</b>	402 (FB)	Expeditor, Harvard, Mustang, T-33 / 1947-51
<b>AD</b>	403 (FB)	Harvard, Mustang / 1948-51
<b>AF</b>	404 (MR)	Lancaster / 1951
<b>AG</b>	405 (MR)	Lancaster / 1950-51
<b>AH</b>	406 (LB)	Harvard, Mitchell / 1948-56
<b>AJ</b>	407 (MR)	Lancaster
<b>AK</b>	408 (P)	Lancaster, Norseman / 1949-51
<b>AL</b>	409 (F)	<b>Note</b> - Allocated but not used in VC era & later assigned “LP” code
<b>AM</b>	410 (F)	Harvard, Sabre, Vampire / 1948-56
<b>AN (1st)</b>	411 (F)	Harvard, Vampire / 1950-51
<b>AN (2nd)</b>	410 (F)	CF-100, 1956-58
<b>AO</b>	412 (K)	Expeditor, Goose, Dakota, 1947-51
<b>AP</b>	413 (P)	Canso, CF-100, Dakota, Lancaster, Norseman, Sabre / 1947-58
<b>AQ</b>	414 (P)	CF-100, Dakota, Sabre / 1947-58
<b>AR</b>	415 (MP)	<b>Note</b> - Allocated but not used in VC era
<b>AS</b>	416 (F)	Mustang, Sabre / 1951-58
<b>AT</b>	417 (FR)	Harvard, Mustang / 1947-48
<b>AU</b>	418 (LB)	Harvard, Expeditor, Mitchell / 1947-51
<b>AV</b>	419 (F)	<b>Note</b> - Allocated but not used in VC era & later assigned “UD” code

<b>AW</b>	420 (F)	Harvard, Mustang / 1947-51
<b>AX</b>	421 (F)	Sabre, Vampire / 1949-58
<b>AY</b>	422 (F)	<b>Note</b> - Allocated but not used in VC era & later assigned "TF" code
<b>AZ</b>	423 (F)	<b>Note</b> - Allocated but not used in VC era & later assigned "NQ" code
<b>BA</b>	424 (F)	Harvard, Mustang / 1947-58
<b>BB (2nd)</b>	425 (F)	CF-100 / 1954-58
<b>BB (1st)</b>	427 (F)	Sabre / 1951-54
<b>BC</b>	426 (T)	Dakota / 1947-51
<b>BD</b>	427 (F)	1947-51
<b>BF</b>	428 (F)	<b>Note</b> - Allocated but not used in VC era & later assigned "HG" code
<b>BG</b>	429 (T)	<b>Note</b> - Allocated but not used in VC era
<b>BH</b>	430 (F)	Sabre / 1951-58
<b>BJ</b>	431	<b>Note</b> - Allocated but not used in VC era
<b>BK</b>	432 (F)	<b>Note</b> - Allocated but not used in VC era & later assigned "DL" code
<b>BL</b>	433 (F)	<b>Note</b> - Allocated but not used in VC era & later assigned "FG" code
<b>BM</b>	434 (F)	<b>Note</b> - Allocated but not used in VC era & later assigned "BR" code
<b>BN (1st)</b>	435 (T)	Dakota / 1947-51
<b>BN (2nd)</b>	6 (S/T) OTU	NASAAR Dakota only
<b>BO</b>	436 (T)	<b>Note</b> - Allocated but not used in VC era
<b>BP</b>	437 (T)	<b>Note</b> - Allocated but not used in VC era
<b>BQ</b>	438 (F)	Harvard, Vampire, T-33 / 1947-58
<b>BR (1st)</b>	439 (F)	<b>Note</b> - Allocated but not used in VC era & later assigned "IG" code
<b>BR (2nd)</b>	434 (F)	Sabre / 1952-58
<b>BS</b>	440 (F)	<b>Note</b> - Allocated but not used in VC era & later assigned "KE" code
<b>BT</b>	441 (F)	Vampire, Sabre / 1951-58
<b>BU</b>	442 (F)	Harvard, Mustang, Vampire /1947-58
<b>BV</b>	444 (AOP) & (F)	Auster, Chipmunk, Sabre / 1953-58
<b>BX</b>	BHTU, Rivers, MB	Harvard
<b>BZ</b>	Air Armament School	Mustang
<b>CA</b>	112 (T) Flt	Dakota, Hadrian
<b>CB</b>	102 KU Flt	Harvard, Mustang, Dakota, Expeditor, H-5. Also known as Central Air Command (CAC) Composite Flight
<b>CC</b>	105 C&R Flt	Norseman, Dakota, H-5, Also known as Northwest Air Command (NWAC) Composite Flight
<b>CD</b>	101 KU Flt	Dakota
<b>CF</b>	111 KU Flt	Dakota
<b>CG</b>	121 KU Flt	Canso, Dakota
<b>CH</b>	103 RU Flt	Canso, Lancaster, H-5
<b>CJ</b>	123 Rescue Flt	Lancaster
<b>CK</b>	NAE / EPE	Harvard, Anson V, Sabre
<b>CL</b>	6 Repair Depot	

<b>CM</b>	10 Repair Depot	Expeditor
<b>CN</b>	1 TTS	
<b>CO</b>	2 TTS	Harvard
<b>CQ</b>	CNS	Lancaster
<b>CV</b>	RAE Det. UK	CF-100
<b>CX</b>	107 RU	Lancaster
<b>DA</b>	1 FTS Centralia	Harvard, Chipmunk
<b>DB</b>	1 FTS Centralia	Harvard
<b>DC</b>	Central Flying School	T-33, Dakota
<b>DD</b>	Central Flying School	Chipmunk, Mustang, Mitchell, Lancaster, Ventura, Expeditor
<b>DF</b>	No 1 Instrument Flying School	
<b>DG</b>	No. 2 R&CS	Dakota
<b>DH</b>	CNS	Harvard, Dakota, Lancaster
<b>DJ</b>	North Bay Stn Flt	T-33, Expeditor
<b>DK</b>	AAS	Ventura, Mitchell, Lancaster
<b>DL</b>	432 (F)	T-33, CF-100 / 1954-58
<b>FA</b>	Chemical Warfare Est	Suffield?
<b>FB (2nd)</b>	CEPE Det / Avro Malton	CF-100
<b>FB (1st)</b>	EPE / CEPE	Expeditor, Mustang, Vampire
<b>FC</b>	EPE / WEE	Lancaster, Mustang, Vampire
<b>FG</b>	433 (F)	CF-100 (1954-58)
<b>GA</b>	Goose Bay Stn Flt	Norseman
<b>GB</b>	Whitehorse Stn Flt	
<b>GC (1st)</b>	Fort Nelson Stn Flt	Norseman
<b>GC (2nd)</b>	109 KU Flt	Expeditor, Bristol Freighter
<b>GD</b>	AFHQ Practice Flt	
<b>GF (1st)</b>	The Pas Stn Flt	
<b>GF (2nd)</b>	Downsview Stn Flt	
<b>GG</b>	1 FTS Centralia	Harvard
<b>GH</b>	Fort Churchill Experimental Station	
<b>GK</b>	104 KU Flt	Dakota (seen in Europe)
<b>GJ</b>	1 (F) OTU Chatham	Vampire
<b>GM</b>	Air Armament School	Mustang
<b>GO</b>	Staff College Toronto / CFS & FIS Trenton	Harvard, T-33, Vampire, Mitchell
<b>GP</b>	1 FTS Centralia	Chipmunk, Expeditor
<b>GQ</b>	1 (F) OTU Chatham	T-33
<b>GS</b>	1 ANS	Lancaster
<b>GT</b>	2 FTS Moose Jaw	Harvard

<b>GU</b>	2 FTS Gimli	Harvard
<b>GV</b>	2 FTS Gimli	Harvard
<b>GW (1st)</b>	2 FTS Gimli	Harvard
<b>GW (2nd)</b>	400 (F)	Harvard, Sabre, T-33 /1951-58
<b>HG (1st)</b>	428 (F)	CF-100, 1954-58
<b>HG (2nd)</b>	2 ANS	
<b>HH</b>	2 ANS	Expeditor
<b>HJ</b>	?	Expeditor
<b>HO</b>	418 (LB)	Harvard, T-33, Expeditor, Mitchell / 1951-58
<b>HP</b>	North Bay Stn Flt	Expeditor
<b>HQ</b>	FIS / CFS	Harvard, Expeditor, Dakota, Canso
<b>HR</b>	PFS Centralia	Expeditor
<b>HS</b>	No. 3 FTS	Harvard
<b>HU</b>	1 PWS MacDonald MB	Harvard, Dakota, Mustang
<b>HW</b>	2 ANS	Lancaster
<b>HX</b>	Air Gunnery School	
<b>HY</b>	WPU	T-33, CF-100
<b>HZ, NM</b>	RCAF Special Flt Northolt, UK	Also known as Canadian Joint Staff UK Station Flight
<b>IG</b>	439 (F)	Sabre, 1951-58
<b>JF, JW</b>	3 (F) OTU	T-33, CF-100 / 1952-58
<b>JL</b>	Chatham Stn Flt	H-5
<b>KC</b>	137 (T) Flt	Bristol Freighter
<b>KD</b>	?	Expeditor
<b>KE</b>	440 (F)	CF-100 / 1953-58
<b>KF</b>	Grostenquin Stn Flt?	Unconfirmed, Dakota & Expeditor both marked
<b>KH</b>	411 (F)	Harvard, T-33, Sabre, Expeditor / 1951-58
<b>KL</b>	Air Gunnery School	
<b>KO</b>	Claresholm	Harvard
<b>KP</b>	109 (Comm) Flt	Dakota
<b>KR</b>	123 S&R Flt	H-5
<b>KT (1st)</b>	105 KU Flt	Dakota, Expeditor, Otter
<b>KT (2nd)</b>	Trenton Station Flt	Otter
<b>LF</b>	Comox Stn Flt	Expeditor
<b>LK</b>	Air Material Command	Expeditor, Dakota, Mitchell
<b>LP</b>	409 (F)	T-33, CF-100 / 1954-58
<b>LV</b>	Camp Borden Stn Flt	Expeditor
<b>MH (1)</b>	442	Mustang, Dakota
<b>MH (2)</b>	PWS MacDonald & Gimli	T-33
<b>ML</b>	2 AFS MacDonald	T-33, Expeditor

<b>MN</b>	408 (P)	Canso, Lancaster, Otter, 1951-58
<b>MT</b>	402 (F)	Replaced "AC" code
<b>MZ</b>	3 FTS Claresholm	Harvard
<b>NH</b>	Greenwood Station Flt	Dakota, Expeditor
<b>NM</b>	Canadian Joint Staff UK Station Flight	Dakota
<b>NQ</b>	423 (F)	CF-100, 1953-58
<b>OJ</b>	4 FTS Penhold	Harvard, Expeditor
<b>ON</b>	1 FIS	
<b>OU (1st)</b>	CJATC Rivers	Auster, C-119, H-5, Mustang
<b>OU (2nd)</b>	102 KU	
<b>OZ</b>	412 (T)	First Comet aircraft only
<b>PF</b>	443 (F)	Mustang, Sabre, T-33 / 1951-58
<b>PP</b>	2 AFS Portage	T-33
<b>PR</b>	403 (F)	Harvard, Mustang, Expeditor, T-33 / 1951-58
<b>PV</b>	424 (F)	Mustang, T-33
<b>PW</b>	111 C&R Flt	Dakota
<b>PX</b>	CEPE	Argus, C-119, CF-100, Expeditor, Lancaster, Mitchell, Sabre, T-33
<b>QD</b>	Goose Bay Station Flt	Dakota, Otter
<b>QJ</b>	420 (F)	Mustang, Harvard
<b>QP (1st)</b>	406 (LB)	Mitchell / 1951-58
<b>QP (2nd)</b>	Instrument Flying School	Expeditor
<b>QT</b>	121 C&R Flt	Canso, H-5, Norseman, Dakota, Otter / 1951-58
<b>QZ</b>	103 RU	Canso, H-21
<b>RI</b>	CJATC Rivers	H-5
<b>RU</b>	102 KU	Mustang, Uplands
<b>RL</b>	12 TSU / Avro	CF-100, CF-105
<b>RO</b>	1 (F) OTU Chatham	
<b>RX</b>	407 (MR)	Lancaster / 1952-58
<b>SA</b>	445 (F)	CF-100 / 1953-58
<b>SL</b>	442 (F)	Harvard, Vampire, Sabre, T-33
<b>SP</b>	404 (MR)	Argus, Neptune / 1951-58
<b>SU</b>	CFS	F-86, T-33, Chipmunk, Dakota
<b>SV (1st)</b>	1 Air Radio Officers School	Dakota, Expeditor, Mitchell / 1951-58
<b>SV (2nd)</b>	2 ANS	Expeditor
<b>SV (3rd)</b>	2 Air Observer School	Supported by 402 Sqn
<b>TF</b>	422 (F)	Sabre / 1953-58
<b>TQ</b>	104 KU Flt	Dakota, Expeditor
<b>TZ</b>	Air Material Command	Dakota

<b>UD</b>	419 (F)	CF-100 / 1954-58
<b>UM</b>	PFTS	Chipmunk, Expeditor
<b>VF</b>	Cold Lake Stn Flight	
<b>VH</b>	444 (F)	Sabre
<b>VN</b>	405 (MR)	Argus, Lancaster, Neptune, 1951-58
<b>VR</b>	Trenton Stn Flight	Otter
<b>VT</b>	FIS Trenton	Harvard, T-33
<b>XA</b>	Whitehorse Station Flt	H-21, Dakota
<b>XK</b>	406 (LB)	Expeditor, Mitchell, T-33 / 1951-58
<b>XS</b>	2 FTS	Harvard
<b>XV</b>	2 (M) OTU	Lancaster, Neptune, 1950-58
<b>ZE</b>	Trenton Station Flt	Auster

\* Not all types on every squadron had codes; for example, the C-119 is not listed for 408, 435 and 436 Sqns. C-119s stationed at the CJATC did however carry "OU" codes.

\*\* Some codes were re-used and / or re-assigned.

\*\*\* Training establishments with large numbers of aircraft were sometimes assigned two codes for the same unit

### Notes:

Many of the RCAF stations had "station flights" to facilitate refresher training, to perform misc tasks or to perform search and rescue missions. Some of these stations had designated KU or RU units in lieu of a station flight. The unit codes for some of these smaller station flights are elusive. The RU nomenclature disappeared and these units were replaced as numbered (search & rescue) squadrons. Also missing from the above listing are prominent locations like Downsview and Bagotville in Canada and Marville, Zweibrucken or Metz in Europe. After unification, while many disappeared, some of these previous station flights first became "base flights" and then eventually "Combat Support Squadrons".

### Abbreviations:

AAS	=	Air Armament School
ADC	=	Air Defence Command
AETE	=	Aerospace Engineering Test Establishment
AFF	=	Acceptance & Ferry Flight
AMC	=	Air Material Command
ANS	=	Air Navigation School
AOP	=	Air Observation Post
AOS	=	Air Observer School
ATC	=	Air Transport Command
Aux	=	Auxiliary
BHTU	=	Basic Helicopter Training Unit
CAF	=	Canadian Armed Forces
CEPE	=	Central Experimental Proving Establishment
CF	=	Canadian Forces
C Flt	=	Composite Flight
CJATC	=	Combined Joint Air Training Centre (Rivers, MB)
CNS	=	Central Navigation School
Comm	=	Communication
(C&R)	=	(Communication & Rescue)
Det	=	Detachments
Est	=	Establishment
(F)	=	(Fighter)

(FR)	=	(Fighter Reconnaissance)
FIS	=	Flying Instructor School
Flt	=	Flight
FTS	=	Flying Training School
KU	=	Composite Unit
(LB)	=	(Light Bomber)
MAC	=	Maritime Air Command
(M)OTU	=	(Maritime) Operational Training Unit
NAE	=	National Aeronautical Establishment (from the National Research Council)
OTU	=	Operational Training Unit
(P)	=	(Photographic)
PT Flt	=	Piston Training Flight
PWS	=	Pilot Weapons School
QTU	=	Operational Training Unit
R&CS	=	Radar & Communication Squadron
RAF	=	Royal Air Force
RCAF	=	Royal Canadian Air Force
RU	=	Rescue Unit
Sqn	=	Squadron
Stn	=	Station
(S&R)	=	(Search and Rescue)
(T)	=	(Transport)
(T&R)	=	(Transport and Rescue)
TAC	=	Tactical Air Command
TC	=	Training Command
TSD	=	Technical Service Detachment
TT Flt	=	Target Towing Flight
TTS	=	Technical Training School
WEE	=	Winter Experimental Establishment
WPU	=	Weapons Proving Unit

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