

ANNEC C

115 ATU RCAF History¹

The Sand Dune

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Aircraft of No. 115 ATU (RCAF) may not have the most comfortable passenger seats, but without a doubt they are among the most-worked flying machines. And the men who operate them for UNEF are second to none in skill and devotion to duty.

The 90-man unit helps to remove a sense of isolation for grateful UNEF members by providing a link with neighboring countries. The three hightailed Caribou transport aircraft, with their prominent UN markings on a field of white, are seldom airborne without carrying a full load of UN personnel, haul freight and baggage. They have a normal carrying capacity of 18,700 pounds of cargo or 28 passengers.

An airline and freight service from El Arish and Gaza to Cairo, Beirut , Port Said and Jerusalem, is combined with a ferry service that takes troops, mail and supplies from_ and to such isolated Sinai desert outposts as El Quesima, El Kuntilla, Ras el Naqb and Sharm el Sheikh.

Although logistical support is the largest task, the unit's operationa1 - role as the aerial eyes of UNEF along the IF is no less important. Two single-engine Otter aircraft, cruising at 100 knots an hour, are used to scan the barren Sinai wastelands in support of ground reconnaissance troops.

On the shuttle service from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, north to. Beirut and southwest to Cairo, the seven pilots in the unit turn in about 200 hours flying time: monthly, and an average of more than 900 nautical miles daily. From April to June this year, statistics show cargoes of more than 230 tons of freight, 42 tons of mail, an equal amount of baggage, and 1,858 passengers.

Middle East flying is much different from flying in Canada, but new pilots quickly adapt themselves to the sameness of the desert and its lack of prominent landmarks. They must fly corridors and must not pass over Israel. Their approach chart warns them to beware of camels and goats on the runway. And they find shimmering heat waves, caused by sand-reflected heat, make Otter landings difficult.

For every hour of flight, the wear and tear of desert flying requires 10 hours of aircraft maintenance. Powdery sand infiltrates bearings and must be washed out weekly, heat and

gravel quickly wears out tires, damages propellers tips, removes paint from fuselage and wing undersurfaces, and gravel propelled by the slipstream cracks starboard side windows.

To keep the aircraft serviceable, there are 55 ground crew personnel representing nine trades and skills. Made up into three maintenance crews, they work in shifts in a large cantilever hangar built by RCE sappers. During busy periods the tradesmen work round the clock. Every 100 hours flying time means a three-day inspection, and a major weeklong inspection is made after 800 hours of flight. At each 1,000 hours, a complete engine overhaul is done and new propellers installed.

With such a heavy workload, and a main supply base 7,000 miles away in Canada, the unit has to stock a large amount of spare parts to keep aircraft serviceable, about 6,000 different items. Major replacements held here are two complete Caribou engines and one Otter engine. A small metal repair workshop turns out pieces of fuselage "skins" and other minor metal work.

The unit's work is international and in itself it is partly international, being supported by several other UNEF units. A Yugoslav guard company is attached, Indian Army signallers look after landline communications and Canadian soldiers operate VHF ground to air communications equipment, provide engineer services and do movement control and postal work.

No. 115 ATU (RCAF) by its efficiency sense of duty, and enviable safety record, stands out as an integral part of a pioneer force.