

A Brief History of the Royal Canadian Armoured Corps School

The Royal Canadian Armoured Corps School (RCACS) was formed on November 1st, 1936 by order of Major-General E.C. Ashton in an effort to modernize and mechanize the Canadian Army, which until then relied mainly on infantry, cavalry and artillery. Under the directive, five infantry battalions would be converted to armour and a sixth battalion, the Essex Regiment, would be stood up. As well, four armoured car regiments were also created. The staff was comprised of volunteers from all Regular Force units with the commandant being Acting Major F.F. Worthington. Operations began in earnest on November 15th, 1936 in the Wolseley Barracks' Royal School Building in London, Ontario as the Canadian Tank School (CTS). This location soon proved to be insufficient, thus only a year later, the school moved to Camp Borden and was renamed to the Canadian Armoured Fighting Vehicles School (CAFVS). The first tank courses began shortly afterwards, which lasted two weeks, a far cry from the over 20 weeks of training today. Ironically, despite being a tank training school, the CTS had no actual tanks in its possession. In fact, the school only had 12 Carden Loyd Machine Gun carriers, a Ford Model T for engine classes, a locally built truck dubbed "old Faithful" and an un-armoured artillery gun tractor nicknamed "the Dragon." It wasn't until September 1938 that the School received its first tanks, which comprised of two Vickers Mark VI B's, which were both armed with .50cal machine guns.

The outbreak of the Second World War proved to be a testing time for the Armoured School. Two of the training battalions were mobilized as the home guard while the school itself was ordered to convert to training infantry carrier drivers instead. It was at this time that the school was renamed to the Canadian Armoured Fighting Vehicles Training Centre (CAFVTC). Four hundred students reported for training, however, unbeknownst to the government, the commandant had virtually ignored the directives and included tank gunnery, tactics and communications into the courses as well.

In fact, in desperation to join the fight in Europe, all but two of the officers returned to their regiments. It wasn't until the success of the German Blitzkrieg in France that Canada found significant value in the Armour Corps. Hence, genuine tank crew training resumed and the Canadian Armoured Corps was created on August 13th, 1940. From there, several other training centres were created to support the massive influx of armoured crew training; spanning three training regiments by the end of hostilities.

The postwar period was just as challenging as wartime, as the Canadian Forces underwent massive change especially in the 1960s. The Meaford Armoured Fighting Vehicle Range was amalgamated to the school and the more modern Centurion main battle tank was put into service. In 1966 however, the school was merged with the Royal Canadian School of Infantry and was renamed the Combat Arms School. To further complicate matters, the school was continually transferred between the newly formed Mobile Command and the Training Command during the years following the unification of the Canadian Forces. It was at this time that the Combat Arms School was moved to its present location in Canadian Forces Base Gagetown and merged with the Royal Canadian School of Artillery. However, the training system faced many difficulties, as the unified operating model proved to be too vague and complicated to be effective. Thus in September 1972, the Armoured Department was created and five years later when it was amalgamated into the Combat Training Centre, it became the RCACS. In 1992, the school was finally relocated from H-20 to its present-day facilities in J-7.

Today, through modernization, the school operates Coyote Reconnaissance Vehicles, LAV Infantry Carriers and Leopard 1&2 Main Battle Tanks as their primary vehicles for training; much more advanced than the WWI era Renault tanks that were purchased from the United States in the 1930s for \$120 each (They were that cheap because “Camp Borden Iron Foundry” bought them as “scrap metal”; the US was restricted from selling arms to other countries). However, from the first class of 52 candidates to the over 1000 trained annually today, the excellence and quality of soldiers produced at the school has been upheld since the day the Royal Canadian Armoured School was formed 75 years ago.