

# BLÉNHEIMS F

**TOM SPENCER** OUTLINES THE SERVICE OF THE BOLINGBROKE WITH THE RCAF

**Below right**  
The pilot of Bolingbroke IV 9026 of 8 Squadron gets the 'thumbs up' from a ground crew member as he manoeuvres past a sister aircraft in 1941. PAC

**Below**  
Equipped with a gun-pack, a Bolingbroke IV of 115 Squadron at Patricia Bay, alongside a Harvard. DND

When someone points at a distinctive-looking wartime twin in a museum and utters the word 'Blenheim', they're very likely wrong, but it's a forgivable mistake. Apart from a Mk.IV under long-term restoration in Finland, all of the intact 'Blenheims' preserved are Canadian-built Bolingbroke IVs: that includes Duxford's superb airworthy example.

To meet the coastal reconnaissance-bomber requirements of the expanding Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) a variant of the Blenheim was selected in 1937. A licence agreement was concluded with Fairchild Aircraft at Longueuil, Quebec, and the new type was

designated Bolingbroke. (See panel for the origins of the name.)

All Canadian-built examples were long-nose variants, similar to the RAF Blenheim IV. The first 18 were designated Mk.Is and featured British-supplied instrumentation and equipment. The first Canadian Bolingbroke I, 702, had its inaugural flight on September 14, 1939. The Mk.II and III were one-

off versions – see page 97.

Of the 676 Bolingbrokes completed, the greatest proportion comprised the Mk.IV; the majority powered by Mercury XV's. Hedging against the threat of any interruption to the supply of engines, a batch of Pratt & Whitney Twin Wasp Junior-powered Mk.IVW's was manufactured. The main production variant





# RAM QUEBEC



was the Mk.IVT gunnery and navigation trainer that made a huge contribution to the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP).

**Left**  
*Bolingbroke IV 9025 of 8 Squadron over Vancouver, April 1943. DND*

## ALASKAN PRIVATIONS

The Bolingbroke I entered service in July 1940 when 119 Squadron at Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, received its first examples, fitted with a gun pack for long-range fighter duties. Part of Eastern Air Command, 119 flew its first operational mission on March 16, 1941, providing escort to HMS *Ramilles*.

**Below**  
*The one-off Bolingbroke I, K7072, showing the much extended 'glasshouse' nose. PETER GREEN COLLECTION*

Patrols over the Gulf of St Lawrence continued and the unit was



## BOLINGBROKE ORIGINS

Bristol developed the Type 149 with a lengthened nose, improved crew positions and increased fuel tankage. It was considered sufficiently different to merit a new name - Bolingbroke - after the small Lincolnshire village and the place of origin of Henry of Bolingbroke, King Henry IV, 1399-1413.

The first Bolingbroke I (occasionally referred to as the Mk.III), K7072, first flew on September 24, 1937 but the windscreen was so far ahead of the pilot that it came in for a lot of criticism from those flying it. The more conventional windscreen with an asymmetric bulged forward section for the navigator became standard and this variant was designated Blenheim IV.



**"Apart from a Mk.IV under long-term restoration in Finland, all of the intact 'Blenheims' preserved are Canadian-built Bolingbroke IVs: that includes Duxford's superb airworthy example"**





**Right**  
Mk.IV 9009 of 8 Squadron at Elmendorf, Alaska, August 1942. PAC

**Below right**  
Yellow-painted Bolingbroke IVTs were a key element for many schools established under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. VIA J D OUGHTON

**Bottom**  
Bolingbroke IV 9052 of 119 Sqn at Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, June 1942. Note the bombs carried under the fuselage, behind the trailing edge. CANADIAN FORCES

re-equipped with Mk.IVWs in August. Flying conditions off the East Coast were often treacherous, with the possibility of engine failure and ditching always present. From June 1942 Hudsons replaced the 'Boleys'. Second Bolingbroke unit was 8 Squadron at Sydney, Nova Scotia, in December 1940 but a year later with the entry of Japan into the war it was transferred to Western Air Command. After the Japanese seized the islands of Kiska and Attu in the Aleutian chain in June 1942, the US requested



**Right**  
Bolingbroke IVTs 9909 and 9977 went head to head at 8 B&GS at Lethbridge, Alberta on July 16, 1944. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION



RCAF support so 8 moved north to Anchorage under the US Alaskan Command. Anti-submarine patrols were flown and detachments sent to Kodiak Island and Nome where they operated in primitive conditions.

At Kodiak, the three Bolingbrokes were beset by problems; spares were in short supply, with the support







chain stretching back to Vancouver. The 'Boleys' were incompatible with American bombs and required field modifications.

The weather was often savage and two of 8's pilots, Plt Off Woods and W/O Lindsay received the AFC for their determination in completing patrols in the most difficult circumstances. The squadron stayed in Alaska until re-locating to Sea Island, British Columbia, in March 1943 to convert to Venturas.

**Left**

*A pair of Bolingbroke IVTs of 3 B&GS from MacDonald, Manitoba. MANITOBA ARCHIVES.*

**Below**

*The one-off Bolingbroke III, first flown as a floatplane on August 28, 1940. PETER GREEN COLLECTION*

### SUBMARINE ACTION

Bolingbrokes transferred from 119 Squadron in August 1941 to equip 115 Squadron in the long-range fighter role. In October, 115 moved west to Patricia Bay, British Columbia, to work up on Mk.IIs, with Mk.IVs arriving during November. By April 1942 the unit was ready for operations and in the middle of the month Flt Lt Lay, Fg Off McCaskill and Plt Off Clarke flew to 115's new base at Annette Island, Alaska, ➔

### BOLINGBROKE VARIANTS

- Mk.I:** Initial production variant, with British instrumentation and equipment. Two 800hp (596kW) Bristol Mercury VIII engines. 18 built.
- Mk.II:** Trials installation with US instrumentation and equipment. One only.
- Mk.III:** Floatplane version. Two 920hp Mercury XV engines. One only.
- Mk.IV:** US instrumentation and equipment. 185 built.
- Mk.IVW:** Mk.IV with two 825hp P&W Twin Wasp Junior engines. 15 built.
- Mk.IVC:** Mk.IV with two 900hp Wright Cyclone engines. One only.
- Mk.IVT:** Mk.IV configured for crew and gunnery training and readily convertible for target-towing. 457 built and 51 spare airframes.



**"After the Japanese seized the islands of Kiska and Attu in the Aleutian chain in June 1942 the US requested RCAF support so 8 Squadron moved north to Anchorage under the US Alaskan Command"**





## RCAF BOLINGBROKE TRAINING UNITS

<b>1 B&amp;GS</b>	Jarvis, Ontario
<b>2 B&amp;GS</b>	Mossbank, Saskatchewan
<b>3 B&amp;GS</b>	MacDonald, Manitoba
<b>4 B&amp;GS</b>	Fingal, Ontario
<b>5 B&amp;GS</b>	Dafoe, Saskatchewan
<b>6 B&amp;GS</b>	Mountain View, Ontario
<b>7 B&amp;GS</b>	Paulson, Manitoba
<b>8 B&amp;GS</b>	Lethbridge, Alberta
<b>9 B&amp;GS</b>	Mont Joli, Quebec
<b>10 B&amp;GS</b>	Mount Pleasant, Prince Edward Island
<b>31 B&amp;GS</b>	Picton, Ontario
<b>1 OTU</b>	Bagotville, Quebec
<b>5 OTU</b>	Boundary Bay, later Abbotsford
<b>31 later 7 OTU</b>	Debert, Nova Scotia
<b>34 OTU</b>	Pennfield Ridge, New Brunswick
<b>36 later 8 OTU</b>	Greenwood, Nova Scotia

**Notes:** B&GS - Bombing and Gunnery School; OTU - Operational Training Unit.

**Below**  
*For target-towing, RCAF Bolingbroke IVs such as 9932 at 8 B&GS at Lethbridge Alta, wore yellow with black stripes. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION*

ahead of the rest of the crews. Flt Lt Curry flew 115's first mission from US soil on May 13 searching for a Japanese submarine 30 miles (48km) west of Annette Island. The suspect 'periscope' turned out to be a branch protruding from a submerged tree trunk!

Action came 115's way on July 7 when a US Coast Guard was attacked by a Japanese submarine. One of the searching Bolingbrokes, flown by F/Sgt P M Thomas, bombed and damaged the enemy off the Aleutians. US Navy warships arrived on the scene and took over the assault; the submarine was assessed as being sunk. This was the first successful strike on a Japanese submarine by the RCAF.

Little was seen of the enemy, but on March 25, 1943, a US ship reported a suspect enemy submarine off the coast but seven Bolingbroke patrols found no sign of it. The squadron's lengthy tour in Alaska finally ended on August 18 when it moved back to Patricia Bay and re-equipped with Venturas.

The RCAF's final Bolingbroke unit was 147 Squadron, based at Sea Island from July 1942. The first anti-submarine patrol was flown when Flt Lt Hunt's crew in 9123 covered the approaches to Vancouver. The squadron retained its Bolingbrokes until March 1944 when it was disbanded: Flt Lt Gee's crew in 9089 flying the last of the unit's 560 patrols on February 29.

### SUPPORT DUTIES

Training for crews destined for operational Bolingbroke units was

conducted in British Columbia by 13 Squadron at Patricia Bay; with Mk.IVs on strength between October 1941 and June 1942. Two composite units used Bolingbrokes for target-towing work – 121 Squadron on the east coast at Dartmouth, Nova Scotia and 122 Squadron in the west at Patricia Bay. The latter's 'Boleys' were the last in squadron service when it disbanded on September 15, 1945.

Undoubtedly the Bolingbroke's biggest contribution to the Allied cause was with RCAF Training Command which provided a steady flow of aircrew under the BCATP. Yellow-painted Mk.IVt's served with Bombing and Gunnery Schools all over the prairies with others at Operational Training Units. This uninterrupted flow of pilots, navigators, signallers and air gunners helped to sustain Bomber and Coastal Commands throughout the war.

As hostilities ended there was a rapid rundown of BCATP and the faithful 'Boley' was soon withdrawn from service. Most ended up in scrap dumps, from where – many years later – some were salvaged to form the basis for the 'Blenheims' that grace today's museums and collections. ●

**"Flt Lt Curry flew 115's first mission from US soil on May 13 searching for a Japanese submarine. The suspect 'periscope' turned out to be a branch protruding from a submerged tree trunk!"**

