



## Top Aces top choice for Canadian tactical training

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A small Canadian training company that just seven years ago consisted of three former fighter pilots has cornered the tactical aviation services.

The turning point for Top Aces of Pointe Claire, Quebec, came in 2005, when it won a \$93.9 million Canadian (\$95.3 million) fast jets for Canadian Forces training. Since then, the company has expanded to provide a variety of aviation-based training to the Canadian Army, Air Force, Navy and special operations forces in a series of contracts that will run until spring 2010.

"We are now the exclusive provider of outsourced tactical aviation services to the Canadian government," said Paul Bouchard, executive and one of the company's founding members.

Under the Contracted Airborne Training Services (CATS) project, Top Aces provides services that include simulating host targets to train gunnery and missile crews, testing radar and communications gear, and providing training for forward air controllers. One of the package is the provision of electronic warfare training, including jamming capabilities in a simulated combat environment.

Under the arrangement, the Canadian military orders such services from Top Aces under set prices and conditions through a "standing offer" system.

"The standing offer approach is low risk for the military, since they are not committed to use the training funds if they don't explain it. "But there is a very significant demand for the training, so it is being used almost to its full capacity every year."

The Canadian Air Force used to provide such services with its fleet of Challenger EW jets and Silver Star combat support aircraft. Canada's Defence Department determined that such services could be provided by the private sector for about 30 per cent less. It transferred those duties to industry.

Top Aces has two fleets of aircraft to handle such duties. It has eight Dornier Alpha trainer jets to serve the Canadian Forces, with more due for delivery by December.

In addition, the company has four modified Westwind business jets for target-towing duties, mainly for the Canadian Navy.

After winning its initial contract, Top Aces moved quickly to establish itself. Six months after winning the deal, its Alpha jets were training Canadian Army forward air controllers heading to Afghanistan.

In the meantime, the company continues to grow. In 2006, it had 65 employees. By 2007, there were about 100.

Bouchard said the company plans to diversify, and Top Aces wants to become a long-term aviation services provider for the world while expanding into international markets.

There could be opportunities in providing the U.S. military with services similar to those offered to the Canadian Forces, but Top Aces sees potential work in providing aircraft to the large U.S. defense firms for their research and development work.

— David Pugliese