

FLY NORTH

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NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO AVIATION HERITAGE CENTRE

Preserving and celebrating the diverse history of aviation in the northwest, through the collection and preservation of artifacts and stories of the persons and events that made this region unique in aviation history

NOAHC News -----

James Dickie:

In October Cathleen Gibson, the granddaughter of James Dickie, a WWI pilot and a former chief instructor with the Fort William Aero Club (FWAC), visited the Centre. She is researching her grandfather's life and came to see if NOAHC might have information that would add to what she had discovered so far. In reality NOAHC could provide little more than she had already accumulated, but Cathleen kindly donated the material she has collected – documents, pictures, newspaper clippings – to the Centre. Cathleen and her husband, Duncan, also made a very generous monetary donation to NOAHC.

James Dickie died tragically in a training accident at the FWAC in 1930. He and Marion Swaim, a recent graduate of the Club were on a practice flight from Bishopsfield when the plane they were flying spun into the ground. James died in the crash, but Marion, although badly injured, survived.

For more on James Dickie and Marion Swaim, see Fly North vol.7/no.3 and vol.8/no.4.

Acquisitions:



Cathleen Gibson has donated this seat belt from the aircraft in which her grandfather died. It was picked up by a policeman who attended the crash site at Bishopsfield in 1930.

Information made available by Cathleen Gibson on James Dickie and by Sam Coghlan on Marion Swaim will provide the basis for a display featuring the accident, currently being prepared at the Centre.

Presentations and displays:

On November 2, NOAHC set up its display of *Lakehead Aviators of the Great War* at the O'Kelly Armouries in Thunder Bay as part of a commemoration of the end of World War I. The event was well attended and our display attracted an appreciative audience.



The NOAHC crew at the Armouries

On November 10, as part of NOAHC's contribution to Remembrance Day, Denise Lyzun and Mary-Alice Isaac visited Lakehead Manor Nursing Home, where they presented the video, *Rosies of the North*, a tribute to the women who worked at Can-Car during WWII. The following day, the Centre provided a program, which featured a video of an interview with Gord Stinson, an RCAF veteran. After training in Canada, Gord was transferred to England to become a pilot in Bomber Command. He graduated from flying twin-engined Wellington bombers to the four-engined Halifax, one of the RAF's heavy bombers. Gord was posted to 404 Squadron, RCAF - known as the Bluenose Squadron. There he flew 39 combat missions over Europe, was wounded, had his plane peppered by shrapnel from exploding flak and was forced to land at an emergency landing field. Bomber Command had casualty levels unmatched by any other branch of the military, with a death rate of 44.5%. Of the 125,000 aircrew, who served during the war, almost 56,000 were killed.

For more on Gord Stinson see Fly North vol.5/no.1

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No. 2 Elementary Flying Training School: Fort William 1940-44 – part 2

Fort William's #2 Elementary Flying Training School (EFTS) was part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) set up in 1939 in an agreement between Britain and Canada to provide facilities and training for airman from all parts of the Commonwealth. The Plan produced nearly 50,000 pilots for the RCAF and RAF. The exact number of those who completed initial training at No. 2 EFTS is difficult to calculate since until May 1943 they were not included in the daily station reports. Prior to that some entries include specific numbers of graduates, but others only mention that a course was completed. Where totals were missing an estimate of 20 was used, based on the average of those courses for which numbers are available. From that it can be calculated that perhaps as many as 1,200 pilots completed their training at Fort William. Not all of the trainees who began a course completed it. For various reasons some were found to have neither the skills nor the temperament to be pilots, had their training discontinued and were reassigned to other roles as air or ground crew. These students were referred to in the reports as 'wastage', which at No. 2 EFTS amounted to 406 students. Also included in this category were those who left the program as a result of fatal accidents. Flying training has its associated dangers and during the BCATP, 856 trainees were killed in accidents. At Fort William, there were 8 fatalities including two instructors. Four of these were caused by mid-air collisions, while three were crashes involving students on solo flights and one in which the plane was caught in a snow squall and hit telephone lines across the Kaministiquia River. Fifty-eight accidents of varying severity are recorded in the school's daily reports. Those causing major damage after which the aircraft was written off were listed as Category A, whereas those with relatively minor damage, such as a broken prop or damage to wing ribs or fabric, which could be repaired on site, were listed as Category D. In between were Categories B and C in which the damage was greater and might or might not be repairable at the school. Most incidents occurred close to or on the airfield itself and included hard landings, ground loops or taxiing accidents. Some happened further afield. These included a crash into Oliver Lake and one south of the border near Grand Portage in which the plane suffered engine failure, crashed and burned. Both instructor and student survived uninjured. The causes of the crashes varied with some caused by equipment issues such as engine failure, some, such as hard landings, by student inexperience and some were weather-related. The latter included the effects of strong winds, squalls, decreased visibility from snow and fog or so-called 'bumpy conditions' near the ground. Under very windy conditions solo flying was cancelled and only dual allowed, while snow and fog would prevent flying completely. Even when the planes were on the ground they were not always safe from the weather. In September 1941, for example, 9 aircraft suffered C and D Category damage when a fast moving storm caught them before they could be moved into the hanger. Winds of 60mph caused six men attempting to move the aircraft to be blown off their feet. At other times the winds were sufficiently strong that had the aircraft not been tied down they would have taken off on their own. Another element influenced strongly by the weather was the state of the airfield. In the beginning the grass field suffered from poor drainage and heavy rain would turn it into a lake or soften the surface so much that the aircraft could not land or take-off. During spring break-up conditions were even worse with several inches of mud on the surface and the station described by the RCAF Chief Supervisory Officer in March 1941 as 'a sea

of mud'. The airfield became unserviceable for several days and flight training was transferred to Bishopsfield until the field dried out. It was found that replacing the tail wheels of the Moths with tailskids made them easier to handle in the mud. Problems with the state of the field occurred quite regularly until mid-1943, by which time a concrete runway had been installed to accommodate the Helldivers being built at Can-Car. Even then the Tiger Moths still used the grass field unless it became too soft when it is noted in the records that they landed 'on the runway'. In the winter, snow could also make the airport unusable, either because of reduced visibility or heavy accumulations on the field. In the latter case the snow was rolled to produce a hard surface and some of the planes were fitted with skis so that training could continue. In the spring, the melting snow and slush produced similar problems to those experienced with a muddy field.

Flying training and ground school kept the students busy, but provision was also made for leisure time. In March 1941, the Lakehead Flying Club hangar was turned into a gym and over the years a rifle range was added as well as football and baseball fields and a tennis court. In the winter a skating rink was installed. In the summer months the students were bussed to Boulevard Lake for swimming. A billiard table, a library and movies provided for indoor activities, but particularly enjoyed by the students were the regular dances organized by the IODE and other groups. Local girls came in to be partners for the students with music provided by a local band, the RCAF band or in the early days by the station 'nickelodian'. The comments on these affairs make interesting reading. The station report noted in July 1941, for example, that the group of girls who attended 'turned out to be second to none, being easy on the eye and light on the hoof'. In October that year, the report stated that 'The Port Arthur girls appear to be far more popular than those brought out from Fort William'. These events seem to have been enjoyed by all, with the only indication of potential friction being reported from a dance in July 1941 where it was reported that 'towards the end of the evening, the RAF lads had practically ousted the R.C.A.F. off the floor'.

Daily reports from No 2 EFTS indicate that while training to be a pilot was intense and sometimes dangerous there were times when some rest and relaxation was possible, perhaps making the whole process that little bit easier.

This article and that in *FlyNorth* vol.10/no.3 really only scratch the surface of the four years of reports on No 2 EFTS. There is much more to be read on the Heritage Canada website at http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c_12336. Further articles will appear in future issues of the newsletter.



Course 87: No 2 EFTS Fort William, August 1943

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James A. Dickie:
WWI Aviator

No 2 EFTS Accidents



courtesy Cathleen Gibson

James Dickie in his Royal
Flying Corps uniform, with an
FE2b aircraft, one of the
planes he flew, in the
background



*Tiger Moth 4025 on
its back after a
landing accident in
September 1941*



*Tiger Moth 5159 following a
Category A crash in April, 1942.
The student pilot suffered only
minor injuries and returned to his
course after only one night in
hospital*

Starratt Airways – The Largest Airline in the World, Once



Starratt Airways DH 83 Fox Moth

In 1932, Robert Starrat formed Starratt Airways, and purchased his first DH 60M Moth, which was used to monitor the progress of shipments across Starratt's burgeoning transportation network. Ultimately Starratt Airways would acquire eighteen aircraft in total and branch out into cargo and passenger transportation, becoming for a brief period the largest mover of passengers and goods in the world. This fleet would include CF-BGY, the first Beach 18 purchased in Canada, and the first ever on floats.



Fokker Super Universal (CF-AJB) and Fairchild 82A (CF-AXG) changing over from skis to floats



With the outbreak of the Second World War the bulk of Starratt's aircraft were requisitioned by the Canadian government, and Starratt sold what remained of his company to Canadian Pacific.

NOAHC would like to thank Robert W. Starratt for the use of his photographs.

Photo essay by Jonathan Sheppard.

Front to back: a Stinson SR-5A Reliant (CF-ANW), D.H. 60M Moth (CF-APO), Beech C17R (CF-BIF), Fokker Super Universal (CF-AJB), and Fairchild 82A (CF-AXD) represent the varied Starratt fleet