

FLY NORTH

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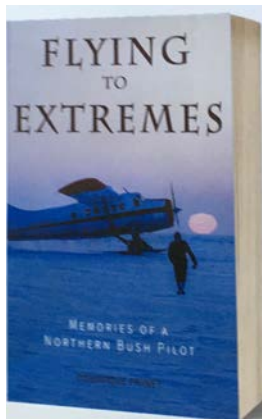
NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO AVIATION HERITAGE CENTRE

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 -----

Zoom Presentation

On April 29, NOAHC hosted a Power Point presentation on Zoom. It was presented by Dominique Prinnet, a former bush pilot who, based in Yellowknife, flew throughout Canada's western High Arctic in the late 1960s and '70s. He flew on floats in the summer and skis in the winter, using an astrocompass since the magnetic compass did not work at such high latitudes close to the pole and GPS had yet to be invented. He provided an entertaining account of the high adventure, long hours and extremes of all sorts that he faced in the Arctic. In his presentation Prinnet described a number of emergencies and mishaps that he had experienced and survived, raising the question of whether it is better to be good pilot or lucky one. He was no doubt a good pilot, but it was also clear from his description of life in the north, he had more than his share of luck. In later years Dominique Prinnet was Vice-President at both Nordair and Canadian Airlines and spent five years in East Africa modernizing Tanzania's national airline.



Copies of Dominique Prinnet's book "FLYING TO EXTREMES - Memories of a Northern Bush Pilot" are available from NOAHC at a cost of \$24.95 (\$20.00 for members). To order, please e-mail the Centre or call 623-3522 and leave a message.

The following link to the publisher's web page provides additional information on the book

<http://www.hancockhouse.com/products/flying-to-extremes>

Major photo donation

Ray Buffington, long-time NOAHC member has generously donated his aviation photography collection to the Centre. It comprises some 24,000 pictures that he has taken over the past 60 or so years. Most are from the Thunder Bay area with examples from Terrace Bay and Marathon in the east to Kenora and Fort Frances in the west. There are also pictures of planes from other parts of Canada, including BC, the North-West Territories and Manitoba. Many different aircraft types are represented, including common models such as Cessna, Piper and Aeronca plus less common types such as the Helio Courier and Israel Astra; there are float planes, ski planes, water-bombers, helicopters and commercial jets all catalogued with registration number, location and date. At present several volunteers from the Centre are checking the pictures to find those that best fit NOAHC's mandate to preserve the history of aviation in the region. These will be catalogued as the "Buffington Collection" and made available to researchers and others investigating the region's aviation history. NOAHC extends its thanks to Ray for this significant donation.



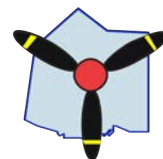
Board member Archie Gribben checking out photographs from the donation

Volunteer Hours

Although NOAHC remains closed as a result of Covid restrictions, between January 1 and May 10, volunteers contributed 260 hours to the Centre.

Inside this issue:

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Recon Air – A Northern Ontario Success Story

The DHC 3 Otter was one of a number of iconic bush planes that served the Canadian north in the decades immediately following WWII. It was a rugged, high-wing aircraft with short takeoff and landing (STOL) capabilities, powered by a 600 hp, Pratt and Whitney R-1340 radial engine and able to carry up to 10 people with a payload of 3,600 pounds. It was equally at home on wheels, floats and skis. Introduced by de Havilland in 1951, it continued in production until 1967, by which time 466 had been built. The company had had great success when it introduced the DHC2 Beaver in 1947 as the first of the new generation of bush planes, but recognised that the aviation in the north was expanding rapidly and there was a need for a larger aircraft. After interviewing companies and pilots about what they would like to see in a new plane, they set out to design an aircraft that would satisfy the bush flying community. Seen initially as a larger development of the Beaver it was initially named the King Beaver, but by the time it went into production it had become the Otter.

Developed as a bush plane, the Otter quickly established itself in that role, but it also served as a military aircraft in a number of armed forces including those of Canada, the USA, Australia and India, and was operated as a civil airliner in various parts of the world from Canada to Australia, Fiji and Norway. However, it is probably as a bush plane that the Otter is best remembered, particularly in Canada, and it continues in that role 70 years after the first plane rolled off the assembly line in 1951.

All of the Otters still flying, of which there are more than 160, are more than 50 years old and continue to fly because of a range of smaller companies that continue to service, repair and restore the aircraft. One of these companies is Recon Air of Geraldton in Northern Ontario. It was founded in the fall of 1990 by Jim Bailey and Roy Leuenberger, Aircraft Maintenance Engineers at Leuenberger Air Services in Nakina. Originally operating out of Jellicoe, as aircraft inspection and repair specialists, the increasing demand for their services led them to relocate to Greenstone, where in 1993 they erected a 6,400 square foot hangar at the Municipal Airport. The company began by servicing different types of aircraft being flown by local tourist outfitters, including Beavers, Otters, various Cessna models and the Norseman, with such success that they added a new 10,000 square foot hangar to accommodate the increasing business. As well as servicing aircraft Recon Air began to rebuild and modify them, starting with the DHC 2 Beaver before developing an expertise for modifying and refurbishing Otters. In addition, the company has also undertaken the recovery and repair of aircraft damaged in crashes and accidents.

Even after production of the Otter ceased in 1967, there was still a need for such a plane. No comparable aircraft was being constructed and the introduction of modifications to the wings and struts, improved STOL capabilities, larger loading doors and advanced avionics in the cockpit, allowed the Otter to retain its place as a leader among bush planes. The most significant modification was the replacement of the original piston engine with a turbo version, which increased power and reliability and reduced operating costs.

The first Otter rebuilt by Recon Air was imported from India, where the fuselage was being used as a chicken coop. Refitted with a Pratt and Whitney (Vazar) Turbine in 1990, it is still flying as CF-WRA for White River Air. By the end of 2019, the company had completed 30 conversions with two more in progress and five others parked at the hangar awaiting their turn to be worked on. The original piston engines have been replaced with the P and W Vazar Turbines or the Garrett Texas Turbine, and Recon Air is now recognized as a world leader in installing and maintaining turbine power plants in the DHC 3 Otter.



*Information for this article has been provided by Warren Kerr of Geraldton, who is in the process of writing a history of Recon Air. His generosity in making the results of his research available to **Fly North** pre-publication is much appreciated.*



An ex-US Army Otter originally based in Europe, C-FCBA was flown by Parsons Airways and Kenora Air Services for 44 years before arriving at Recon Air in 2016. Currently sitting outside the Recon hangar waiting its turn to be rebuilt and fitted with a turbine engine



This aircraft was seriously damaged in 1990 after crashing on take-off at Pickle Lake. The wreck was purchased by Recon Air in 2005 and by 2008 it had been rebuilt and fitted with a turbine engine. Registered as C-GDHW it now flies out of Watson Lake in the Yukon

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RECONAIR

Geraldton Airport, Ontario



JOHN ANDREWS
FOUNDATION

When the current Covid restrictions have been lifted, NOAHC will once again host a monthly bingo at the Superior Shores Gaming Association on Memorial Avenue. The returns from these events make an important contribution to the Centre's revenue.



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A few samples from the Buffington Collection – many more to come



Interesting Photo Finds

Can Car Hurricane

NOAHC member Wayne Pettit recently bought a couple of pictures on e-Bay that were taken at Fort William Airport in the early 1940s. They were first shown on the NOAHC Facebook page and subsequently Wayne passed copies on to *Fly North*. One picture shows a Hawker Hurricane surrounded by a large number of people, probably at some special event, with Mount Mackay as a backdrop. In the other, the words ROYAL NAVY and the registration BW835 can be clearly seen on the port side of the plane's rear fuselage and with a little research that information provides additional detail on that particular aircraft. BW835 was the first of the fourth production batch of Hurricanes built in Fort William in 1941. Planes in that consignment were built as Sea Hurricanes for the Royal Navy, but some accounts say they were assigned to the RCAF and others say that most were shipped to Russia. However, BW835 was retained in Canada for trials that included converting it to a so-called Catafighter, which could be catapulted from a merchant ship to help protect convoys from air attack.



Picture of BW835 – probably the Gary Madore Hurricane, Fort William, August 1941

Another intriguing feature of the photographs is the number of people in them. Why were they there? Surely it must have been a special event, and additional investigation provides a possible reason. In August 1941, Can-Car employees worked for free on two Sundays to build two Hurricanes for the Wings to Britain Campaign in memory of two former workers at the plant who had been killed flying in the RAF and RCAF. One was Gary Madore, a pilot who had learned to fly at the Fort William Aero Club, and the other was Phillip Taylor who flew as an air gunner. On August 19, 1941 perhaps as many as 6,000 people came out to the airport to see the planes being christened and presented. Could these be pictures of the presentation event? With BW835 coming off the line in 1941 the timing is about right. In addition, there is a name painted on the side of the aircraft just below the cockpit and Wayne has confirmed that the first name is Gary, with the second beginning with the letter M although the remainder of the name is not readable. Overall, it seems that there is a good chance that these are pictures of the presentation event.

Bushplanes – 1930s vintage

Some time ago, NOAHC member Rod Spicer passed these pictures on to *Fly North*. The editor apologizes for taking so long to investigate and publish them.



Junkers W33, (CF-ASN) of Canadian Airways taxiing across the lake at Rat Rapids. It later crashed and was withdrawn from use on June 24, 1948



Fairchild 71 (CF-AOP) was a flown by Canadian Airways. It was actually a rebuild of CF-AKY another Fairchild 71 that ran into the tow line of a tug in Vancouver harbour on May 6, 1935. The fuselage was recovered and incorporated in CF-AOP



CF-AQV was a Junkers 33/34 owned by Canadian Airways. It crashed 5 miles SW of Gold Pines on September 1, 1939. It hit trees while low flying in poor weather. The remains are currently in the Deutsches Technikmuseum in Berlin. It is to be restored in Hungary and will go on display at the Technikmuseum when restoration is complete.