

V-hoof airport developed during WW II

When the Wright Brothers made their famous inaugural flight at Kitty Hawk in 1903, Vanderhoof was virgin land populated by Carrier Indians.

During the next ten years, settlers laboured their way into the British Columbia wilderness, establishing an agricultural pocket along the Nechako River. Soon after, the railway followed, bringing an impetus for development that translated the beginning community into a mushrooming, forty-six building town. By the beginning of World War 1, Vanderhoof boasted a candy factory, a Board of Trade, a logging yard - and a name.

Rapid advances in aeronautics were made during the first great war and by 1926 a man had flown the Atlantic.

Prince George had its first visitation by aircraft in 1920 when the four plane American Flying Expedition landed during a flight from New York to Nome, using Central Avenue as a makeshift runway. So many damages were suffered in landing that a twelve day stopover for repairs was required.



Radio operator Audrey Smedley-L'Heureux.

A year later, the 'Polar Bear' arrived in Prince Rupert during a sensational Mexico to Siberia flight. Excited citizens persuaded the pilot to stay over and entertain at the Fall Fair, a highly successful venture for the town but disastrous for the pilot.

While demonstrating his skills and equipment in a storm, the pioneer's plane was severely damaged, forcing him to



Leading Aircraftsman, Scotty Almond.

abandon his journey while only part way through.

Several other round-the-world adventurers descended on Prince Rupert in subsequent years as its waterfront location made an ideal jumping off point for Pacific crossings.

By the time Lindberg traversed the Atlantic in the fall of 1926, Vanderhoof had incorporated and become self-governing but had never played host to a plane.

In 1928, the year Prince George purchased airport land, a single engine biplane owned by Yukon Airways Exploration Company of Whitehorse set down in a Vanderhoof pasture. By autumn, aerial maps were being made of the town and the neighbouring district.

Gold fever was running high at the time, attracting would-be prospectors to the Omineca and Manson Creek fields and transforming Takla Landing into a booming northern air base.

Two float planes made brief appearances in Vanderhoof in 1934; one through a pilot's error and the other on a mining expedition.

Three years later, a landing strip was constructed on the Cocker and Emslie farm, the same Highway 27 acreage that houses the airport today.

Intended for emergencies, the strip was seldom used although a Pan American plane made local history by stopping over while en route to Alaska in 1941.

With a second world war approaching, the Department of Defense took the Vanderhoof airport under its wing, increasing the size of the property, clearing and levelling the runway, and installing a radio range station.

Department of

Transport employees were brought in to staff the communications operation while air force personnel were placed in charge of maintenance by the Western Air command.

Four look-alike houses, still standing today, were constructed on the perimeter of the airport for the Transport men and their families and an army base, now torn down, was established for the soldiers.

At one point, twenty men were stationed at the Vanderhoof Airport.

Since the landing strip was intended for emergency use, it was maintained at all times and in all weather. Leading Aircraftsman (LAC) Scotty Almond, in charge from 1944 to 1946, recalls that he often received orders at night to prepare for a landing, but one never came.

"All the local farmers thought we were crazy", he says, "because we'd be out there with lights, rolling the runways at night."

"We had to maintain the runways and see that the lights and all the equipment was in working order for emergency landings. We had big rollers, and we rolled the snow until it was hard like ice so it could be landed on."

Although the runways were built at the time, little of the airport land

had been cleared, and wild animals abounded. One day, recalls Almond, the maintenance crew shot three deer and

a coyote on the landing strip.

Audrey Smedley - L'Heureux, sent to Vanderhoof by the

Ministry of Transport in 1945 to staff radio-wireless operations and

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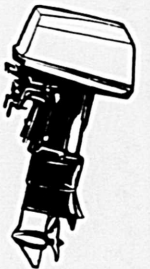
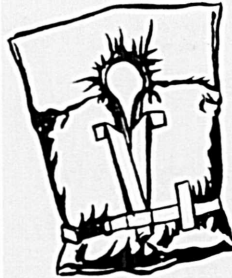
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