

**A TRIBUTE TO HERMAN PETERSON  
TRANSPORTATION HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE**

**By Donna Clayson**

**Herman & Doris Peterson  
August 3, 1996**



**Photo Courtesy Clive & Julie Aspinall**

## Recollections from Donna Clayson

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I first met Herman and Doris Peterson the summer of 1968 in Atlin, B.C. My former husband, Rick Ross introduced me to this very special couple and I was immediately impressed to have met such a respected couple of the small community of Atlin.

Herman, quiet and shy as my first impression quickly warmed to my questions as to why there was an airplane outside his window, bobbing and dipping with the waves of Atlin Lake. Doris smiled at my queries, not saying a word, quietly preparing tea and dainty desserts for her young guests.

Lassie, their collie lay down at my feet causing a bit of a stir from Herman saying she normally took five minutes to warm to strangers, three minutes just set a record. As my toes caressed Lassie's soft, silky coat I again inquired as to why there was an airplane outside the front door.

As the tea and desserts were set in front of us by a small, attractive lady whose long blond hair was tied in a tight bun Herman began his story.

Herman explained he had been taken with the excitement of air travel at a young age and had formed his own business. Doris, his business partner was actually the bones of the company, he explained, as he lovingly touched his wife's hand when both reached for a dessert at the same time. The love and peacefulness I felt in that room at that moment stunned me a bit. I had never witnessed anyone "that old" with that much affection before.

As Herman and Doris explained the way the business operated and related the fond memories of past employees I was surprised when Rick said we had to get going, it was late and we still had to drive back home to Whitehorse. How the time flew. As Herman and Doris walked with us to the back door and to our car I knew a special relationship had begun. Little did I know until this summer when I started researching material for this article how many "special relationships" the Peterson's would have over the years.

Rick and I did, in fact, visit the Peterson's as often as we could. I couldn't get enough of his flying stories and how he built his biplane, "Suzy". It was around 1986 when I introduced my second husband Bryan to Herman and Doris. They hit it off immediately and, again we were treated to tea and dessert. Herman had been repairing a violin for Rick and he was pretty excited when he asked if my young daughter, Verena would like a lesson. Herman couldn't believe it when I mentioned my daughter had started piano lessons at age three and was, at the age of 12 thinking about taking violin lessons. (Note: Rick gave this violin to Herman a short time later).

Down to the newly renovated basement we went. Herman had just finished installing surround sound and took some time showing us all the intricate workings of the speakers, tuners, etc. which didn't make any sense to me but seemed to capture Bryan's attention. As Herman made

himself comfortable on a small stool with Verena beside him the rest of us settled into our own chair and waited for the lesson with her dad's newly repaired violin to begin.

It didn't take Verena long to get bored with the lesson. All she wanted to do was hear Herman play. After all, she'd heard about how his fingers could fly too and produce wonderful music on his homemade instruments.

I noticed a look come over Herman's eyes as he made himself comfortable, violin and bow ready. I glanced over at his wife and she was stroking Lassie's fur, her eyes sparkling with love and respect. It brought tingles to my body and I thought of the phrase, "The House That Love Built." Soon, the sounds of music resonated throughout the large room, the speakers literally booming and Verena sat forward in her chair. After all, we were in the presence of an artist.

This past summer I played around with the idea of doing an article on the Peterson's. When I talked to Joyce Yardley and asked her opinion she indicated it was a great idea. I put the word out that I was looking for memories from the folks that had crossed their path. I did indeed receive some stories and as you read them you will see what I mean by "special relationships."



**Moe Grant's Fairchild 24 (CF-SFU) and Herman's Suzy (CF-RKN)  
Photo Courtesy Clarence Tingley**

## 1950 crash victim grateful to air pioneer

by Stephanie Waddell Star Reporter

A **Whitehorse Star** Archive story originally published June 6, 2003

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Moe Grant makes visits to his long-time friend Herman Peterson just about every day. The memories of how Peterson rescued him from an airplane crash are still strong after more than half a century. "I wouldn't have been alive today if it hadn't been for him," Grant said in an interview Thursday afternoon.

On Wednesday evening, Peterson was inducted into the Yukon Transportation Hall of Fame as a 2003 Transportation Pioneer of the Year along with Percy DeWolfe. James Mutch, as well as Fred and Jean Cook, were inducted as 2003 Transportation Persons of the Year.

In February 1950, Grant was flying by himself between Carcross and Atlin, B.C. when a mechanical problem forced his plane down. He had no food or emergency signaling system. "The food was the least of my worries, but I didn't have any water either," Grant said. "I was eating snow, and trying to walk out, but the snow was too deep and I broke my foot and dislocated my ankle in the crash."

He did have a bottle of scotch he took a sip from, which dehydrated him more than anything, he said. The first night, his foot froze, which acted somewhat like an anesthetic, so he could walk on it without much pain. He walked as far as he could under the circumstances, but as search planes flew over him on the side of the mountain where he had crashed, nobody noticed him. He eventually made it down to the mountain's timberline where he thought he could make a fire using matches in his pocket. When he went to take them out, however, he found they were soaked. "I had packed the engine tent – the canvas engine tent," Grant said. "I packed that down the mountain with me as kind of a shelter, and I wrapped myself up in that. I got underneath a tree out of the wind and that's where I stayed for three or four days." The body heat melted the snow around him. "I got that melted down to the ground under the tree. (It was) like I was laying in a grave," he said. As planes flew over, Grant would wave to them, but he was never spotted. Around four days after the crash, the search was called off.

There were two people who never gave up, though – Grant's father and Peterson. "Herman had flown that route so many times that he happened to spot something a little different on the side of that mountain he hadn't seen before.... He just happened to be at the right angle, the sun happened to be just right and he spotted the aircraft on the side of the mountain and he radioed into Whitehorse," Grant recalled. Shortly afterward, Grant was rescued.

Peterson and his wife, Doris, have been like parents to him, he said. Born in Lachute, Que. in 1913, it didn't take Peterson too long to know he wanted to be a pilot. At 10 years old, he convinced his father to take him to see a float plane that had landed in the area. He bought his first plane for \$250 when he was in his early 20s. The plane had crashed, but Peterson planned to fix it up. He even got his first lessons out of the deal from the plane's owner, Joe Fecteau. By 1942, Peterson had earned his commercial and air engineer licenses. He went to work for Northern Airways in Carcross. His first assignment was to assist in removing equipment and live ammunition from three American B-26 bombers that crashed in Million Dollar Valley. He would go on to deliver supplies for the Canol Pipeline project, along with mail and passengers in various aircraft from Carcross to Telegraph Creek, Tulsequah and Iskut.

In 1950, he and his family moved to Atlin, where he started the community's first air service – Peterson's Flying Service. The first contract for the company was to deliver mail from Atlin to Telegraph Creek. Peterson spent more than 25 years delivering mail, supplies and people throughout the North. At one point, Peterson considered getting out of the business when one of his planes – a Cessna 180 – crashed and burned north of Telegraph Creek. It was being piloted by a representative with the Geological Survey of Canada and there was a passenger on board who worked for Consolidated Mining and Smelting. Both were killed. When another pilot spotted the smoke, he flew in to assist, but was caught in the same downdraft which caused the initial crash. This plane went down as well, but nobody was injured. "You get over these things, but you never really get over it," Peterson said years after the incident. He retired in 1967, but continued flying as he acquired planes for fishing trips and even built his own Smith Special biplane named Suzy.

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### **Recollections from Joyce Yardley**

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It was such a treat to read the article on Moe Grant and Herman Peterson (Moccasin Telegraph, Edition 22). Moe and his family, and Herman and Doris (Suzy) Peterson lived in Carcross in the '40s, the same time period that my late husband and I were living there. In fact we were partners with the Petersons in a small store there for one summer, (I believe it was the summer of 1950). We sold fresh produce grown organically at "Ten- Mile Ranch," which Gordon and I still owned at that time. Matthew Watson bought out the competition in the fall of the year, as the Peterson's were moving to Atlin, to start their own flying business there. And we had a ranch to look after. Before that they were our next-door-neighbours on the shore of Bennett Lake. Incidentally, I was Postmistress in Carcross from 1955 to 1960.

Our little daughter Norma was going to the "one-room" schoolhouse in Carcross at that time. Gudrun (Erickson) Sparling will remember that schoolhouse, as she taught school there one year. Herman and Doris Peterson built their home right next to ours, and when they left Carcross their house was used for a newer, larger school.

I remember the Reverend Grant's family well; they lived across the bridge, and were good friends of ours. Moe occasionally came with us on some of our fishing expeditions on Bennett Lake. We kind of liked that kid. Remember the time we nearly drowned, Moe, when Norma was a wee baby? I have pictures of that trip, where we were "beached" overnight, and our little dog chewed the nipple off the one-and-only spare bottle of milk I had for her! Thank goodness the wind went down before morning... We were with Emerson and Maude Edwards that time.

There is one other thing I'd like to mention about Herman Peterson. He not only built airplanes from scratch, which passed all the Canadian regulatory requirements. He was (and still is) a master craftsman in the building of violins modeled after those of Stradivari. His work is superb. As you've probably guessed by now, he is one of my heroes.

## Recollections from Elwood Lyle

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Thanks for your invite to add to Herman's life and times although I've heard of Herman since the late 30's when he and Pat Callison took flying lessons I never was privy to a lot of his flying experiences, which are numerous, as they were in the early days. This man along with Pat opened up the North when no roads were around, not even the Alaska Highway. Never were there any navigational aids to help, they literally flew by the seat of there pants (whatever that means). They did a lot of bush flying in the early days, summer or winter they were always ready to go on a moments notice.

I did work in Atlin in 1967 but Herman had sold out that year to TNTA and I was with TNTA. I took over to keep the 4 fixed wing and a helicopter in flying order etc.

Below is a photo of Herman that I took behind his house in 1967. That is "Suzy" that he built in his garage. (When he could get away from building excellent Violins). I think Moe Grant and Joe Lucien played his Violins for years.



**Herman, Lassie & Suzy**  
Photo courtesy Elwood Lyle

## **Recollections from Lyle Coleman**

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The article on Herman Peterson is most interesting. I rode in the Fairchild 71, Anson and later Herman's own Aeronca sedan from which I still have an original propeller.

I worked for Herman while in high school and some of the time under instruction from him while flying the Beaver on floats was credited to my Private Licence as was the final few hours on Moe's float equipped Cessna 170. I received my private License on my 17th Birthday with a seaplane endorsement.

There is a small error regarding the loss of Herman's Cessna 180 at Telegraph Creek, B.C. in 1957. The pilot was Robert Ray, age 28 who is buried in Atlin. I visited his grave a few weeks ago as he had befriended me before his death. He had worked in the Telsequah mine and became interested in flying after riding with Herman who serviced the mine from Atlin on a scheduled basis. Herman gave him his first job. Unfortunately his limited experience prevented him from recognizing the trap the Stikine river valley can create due to subsidence caused by the high terrain and the air flowing into the valley. He was unable to outclimb the terrain and lost control, stalled and burned.

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## **Recollections from Danny Bereza**

**Courtenay, BC**

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Herman Peterson: I remember him as the person who really taught me how to fly an airplane. In 1964 I had a commercial pilot license with the ink still wet but even with my inexperience Herman hired me to fly his Super-Cub on floats for the summer.

When I arrived in Atlin, he met me in his beautiful, old Ford pick-up that was painted in the bright yellow and red of Coast Range Airways. He had an intense, ruddy face and unruly, curly hair. He drove slowly through the town, shifting gears carefully so he wouldn't do any harm to his vehicle. It was immaculate as, I found out, were his airplanes. One of the first things he said to me was, "Don't you ever do careless damage to your airplane. If you crash it, that's okay because accidents happen. But if you scratch it you will be in trouble."

He took me to his home on the waterfront of Atlin Lake where I met his wife and business partner, Doris. She had a pleasant, smiling face and long, blond hair tied up in a bun. She greeted me warmly and offered me a coffee. So there we all sat, on the shore of one of the most beautiful lakes in the world, sipping coffee and chatting about flying while their dog, Lassie, lay beside us with her eyes moving back and forth between us as we talked.

Later Herman took me flying in the Cub. I spent many hours learning how to REALLY fly an airplane from a pilot who was already a legend in the North. He was flying commercially when I was still in diapers. He taught me how to land on fast flowing rivers where any mistake could end up in disaster. He taught me how to land on small, high altitude lakes where you approached, flying slowly over the tree-tops until you passed the last tree. You then pushed the control stick

forward toward the water and pulled back at the last minute so the airplane could splash down in the minimum distance. He taught me how to land on water when there was no wind and the water was as flat as glass making it very difficult to judge your height above the surface. He said, "Try to land near a shore so you can have some perspective. But if you can't land near a shore for whatever reason, open the side window so you can clearly hear the engine sound and the wind rushing by the airplane. Set up a shallow rate of descent and listen for the change of sound as the airplane nears the water and the engine noise is echoed back to you. You then pull back on the stick a little and you will touch down smoothly." It took many attempts before I finally got it, but it worked! I used that technique often during my float-flying days.

Herman loved airplanes. He loved to fly them and he loved to work on them. And he did both, with a passion. He was an excellent pilot and in my opinion, a mechanical genius. He was in the final stages of building an Experimental Aircraft Association Biplane that he christened Suzy, after his pet-name for Doris. He gave me a picture of it sitting inside the building where he built it. The engine had been installed and it was basically complete, waiting to be covered in fabric. The workmanship was awesome. The aluminum frame had been welded perfectly like a work of art. Later on in life he built violins with the same attention to detail.

At the end of the float season in September I went Outside but returned again in 1966 to fly one of his Beavers. During that summer he bought a DeHavilland Otter that he used as a water-bomber to fight forest fires in the Yukon. It came with a tube-like cylinder that was attached to the underside of the fuselage between the floats. The pilot would land on a lake and taxi fast so the cylinder would fill up with water through pick-up tubes similar to a snorkel. He would then take off to the fire where the load of water would be dropped. Unfortunately the mechanism didn't always work. The cylinder that held the water was weighted off-centre so that it would roll into the pick-up position after the drop but it didn't always roll and lock into the correct position. Herman spent several frustrating days trying to get the system to work correctly.

One night I was sitting having tea with Doris when Herman landed and came storming into the house. "That drop mechanism doesn't work, Christ!" He began to pace around the house muttering to himself and shaking his head. "I'll just have to invent a new system." I looked at Doris. She nodded her head and we quietly left him alone.

The next morning I went to their house to find Herman drinking coffee with foolscap paper full of drawings surrounding him on the table. He had a bedraggled look about him. He was twiddling his hair in his fingers and looked up when I came in. "I think I've got it worked out." He hadn't slept all night but his face was flushed with excitement. His design was simple and it worked better than the manufacturer's version. He had Clarence Tingley, an excellent jack-of-all-trades who worked for him, make a small container and attach it inside the cylinder. The container would also fill with water during the pick-up stage and after the drop was made, the weight of the water inside the container would give it that extra kick it needed to roll into the pick-up position. The water would then bleed out through small holes so that the cylinder could roll to the dump position when full.

Herman was a passionate man, emotional almost to a fault. One time while I was in Telegraph Creek with the Cub he was doing an inspection on a Beaver aircraft that was tied to the city dock on the Stikine River. The water in the Stikine flowed so fast that it actually had a hump in the middle of it. I saw him standing on one of the airplane's floats, holding a wrench in his hand, shaking his head and stomping his foot up and down. He was obviously having trouble with the airplane's engine because the cowling was open. As I approached he suddenly let out a sob and threw the wrench into the river. I beat a hasty retreat back to my quarters. The next day the airplane was serviceable so he must have got another wrench from somewhere.

On the occasional evening after a hard day's work he would take-off in Suzy, now fully completed, and roll and loop around the puffy, popcorn cumulus clouds in the big, northern sky, relieving his tension and flying just for the love of it. He offered me the chance to fly Suzy but I declined. As much as I wanted to fly it I would have felt terrible if I put even a small stone nick in it from the gravel airstrip.

The Herman I knew was not a hard task-master. He only expected me to treat his equipment with respect and to do my job to the best of my ability. He treated the pilots well who worked for him, almost like the sons he never had. When I left him in the fall of 1966 he walked slowly with me to the taxi. We stood for a moment talking about -- I don't know -- maybe the weather. We then shook hands and I told him that I would definitely come back to visit some day. I wanted to hug him but I didn't.

Dammit.



**Herman & Suzy**  
**Photo Courtesy Clarence Tingley**

## **Recollections from Bill & Carol Dayton**

**Leduc, Alberta**

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In the spring of 1966, at the age of 25 and with limited experience, I arrived in Atlin to fly for Herman. As I was the only pilot employed year round, Herman and I had lots of time to visit in his shop or in the kitchen over a cup of coffee.

During those times Herman passed on an incredible amount of invaluable information that was gained from his own experiences through the years of flying in extremely remote and mountainous country in all kinds of conditions. During one of these conversations he passed on a piece of information that would, just a few months later, save my life and the lives of four of my passengers. To this day I still draw on the wisdom that was passed on to me by Herman and I will always feel grateful and privileged that I had the good fortune to fly for Herman Peterson at Coast Range Airways during the early years of my career.

In June of that year I went Outside to get married and brought my new wife, Carol, to Atlin and to her new home which was Doris' cabin that came with the job. A couple of years later when Herman sold to Trans North Carol and I thought we had better start paying rent to Doris. When we asked her how much she replied "would \$15 be too much?" We often remember how sweet that was of her and how we settled on \$25. Right from the beginning Doris and Herman made us feel like family and we always felt that they took the place of our parents who were a 1,000 miles away.

Another one of the many good memories was when we lived in Whitehorse and had a cabin in Atlin. We went in for a few days to do some finishing touches on the cabin. All of a sudden we looked out the window and there was Doris and Herman coming up to the cabin carrying a fully cooked Thanksgiving dinner. What a wonderful surprise!! After polishing off Doris' good cooking Bill and Herman went out and finished building the outhouse. Herman often laughed later that they had used a pair of gloves for hinges on the outhouse door.

Such great memories!!

## **Recollections from Rick Ross** **Whitehorse, Yukon**

I was a dock boy for Herman from the age of 14 to 16 (1964 to 1966). My duties were to fuel the 5 planes and one helicopter plus wash them. I also assisted the mechanics with maintenance on the aircraft. Just before I left to go to school in Whitehorse Bill Dayton became the pilot and Clarence Tingley a mechanic.

The planes were docked at First Island and it was my job to run a boat to the Island with a pilot when a plane was needed. The pilot would ferry the plane to the main dock beside the Tarhane. It was also my responsibility to bring passengers back in the boat to the dock.

It was because of my experience when working for Herman that I gained a keen interest in Aircraft. I eventually went to work for Great Northern Airways in Whitehorse and a short stint with NWT Air in Yellowknife as a mechanic. The experience I gained as dock boy was invaluable and still wish to this day I had stuck with aircraft.

I'd like to wish all the best to Herman and Doris and thank them both for helping a kid learn invaluable lessons.

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## **Recollections from Clarence Tingley** **(Retired)** **Trail, B.C.**

I arrived in Atlin on April 24, 1966 and met Herman for the first time. I had previously talked to him on the phone and explained that I had little knowledge of aircraft but was willing to learn and get my license.

Herman was agreeable and, thusly, I met him and started to work for him. I well recall his words and they were this: *“Clarence, whenever you are working on an aircraft and the whistle blows, never put down your tools until the job is finished. That way no job gets forgotten about and the Airplane doesn't fly with some part not safetied.”* This was very good advice and I followed that practice for the rest of my career as an Engineer.

Herman is one of those rare human beings who only seem to come into this world very infrequently and they leave their mark on those around them to such an extent that they are never forgotten. Herman was such a man.

Herman loved to fly and he loved Atlin. I am proud to have had the honor of working with him and getting to know him and those same thoughts will remain with me until my time comes.

I would like to mention too that Doris played a major part in Herman's life. Not just a small part but really had a tremendous influence on him. As I understand it she acted as base manager, radio operator, accountant, customer service and complaint department. I heard that in earlier days she operated the boat and hauled freight. I suppose in her spare time she washed dishes clothes and cooked meals. That rates pretty big in my books

**Herman Peterson on the shore of Atlin Lake  
Luscombe 8E Taken around 1966**



**Photo Courtesy Clarence Tingley**

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**Recollections from Vera Kirkwood  
Atlin, B.C.**

I first met Herman Peterson when he flew me from Carcross into Atlin in 1950. I was to take up nursing in Atlin. He was flying for Northern Air Service. We had to wait two days as the temperature was  $-80^{\circ}\text{F}$  below and we couldn't get the skis loose from the ice – this was the first week in January. When it warmed up to  $-45^{\circ}\text{F}$  below, we took off.

When Herman applied later that same year to set up an air service of his own in Atlin, I was at the hearing because I felt I had lost a patient who I felt, with quicker access to hospital, might have survived.

Over the years we have become fast friends. We've been next door neighbors for twenty years. Herman has made many great violins as well as being one of the north's fine bush pilots.

A wonderful man with a great heart.

Clive Aspinall's **Northern Report**

Herman Peterson; A Great Canadian Bush Pilot who served the people of the Yukon and NW-British Columbia for 25 years

27<sup>th</sup> August 2002

Living in Atlin with his wife Doris, is one of Yukon's and NW-British Columbia's great bush pilots.

This title has not been awarded by a government or any formal institution. This title would readily be agreed by everyone who flew with Herman during his 25-year career in the North.

This year is their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary since coming to the North.

Herman Peterson was born in Latuque Quebec on 29 December 1913. Herman's desire to fly came about when he was very young, perhaps before ten years old. When he told his father he wanted to be a pilot when he grew up, his father, according to Herman, wanted none of it for his son.

Herman persisted with his boyhood dream, and at the age of about 10 years old actually managed to persuade his father take him to see a "Vickers Vidette" flying boat that had landed on a lake near a family outing. Herman actually managed to sit in the cockpit, and push the controls. This event sealed his flying destiny.

Years later and still focused on his dream; Herman made friends with the Fecteau flying brothers of Quebec. Both Joe and Art Fecteau were pilots using a base near Montreal, flying passengers to Latuque.

Finding flying schools to learn flying in those days was difficult. Joe, the other Fecteau brother offered Herman flying lessons. In 1936, Herman bought his first airplane for \$250, a Simmonds Spartan (registered CF-ABC) from Joe. It was a plane that had actually been crashed. However, Joe and his brother offered Herman help to rebuild this aircraft. Herman never flew CF-ABC.

Before he completed his flying training, Herman married his fiancée, Doris, (nee Bachelder) in 1939. Doris was a girl from Alberta, but had moved to Latuque where she met Herman.

Herman earned his commercial license in 1941, and in 1942 went on to earn his air engineer license. In February of that year, he and Doris moved to Carcross YT, and accepted work with ***Northern Airways***. George Simmons owned this flying service.

On arriving in Carcross at the age of 29, Herman had logged 200 flying hours. The remoteness of the north, flying an assortment of bush planes, and the cold Yukon winters was to be new to him.

Like all pilots, Herman needed time to adjust to new conditions. Herman's first job with the company was that of pilots helper to Alec Dame. A first assignment was to remove all the equipment from three American B-26 bombers that had crashed in "Million Dollar Valley" a month before. During this task, temperatures were -40F to -50F below, but Herman and Alec removed all equipment from these aircraft, including ammunition.

Other jobs with *Northern Airways* involved supplying the Canol Pipeline Project. This project was initiated at the same time as the Alaska Highway. The goal of the pipeline project was to pump oil from the oil fields of Norman Wells to Whitehorse to supply the Alaska Highway construction, in addition to providing fuel to aircraft along the Northwest Staging Route. Another job was flying mail and passengers from Carcross to Telegraph Creek, and sometimes to Tulsequah and Iskut.

During this period with *Northern Airways* for eight years, when about 1950 he decided to set up his own flying service in Atlin, a small gold rush town in NW-BC, and located in a beautiful mountainous and lake setting. By this time, *Northern Airways* was running into financial problems and after a few months' stint as a deck hand on the paddlewheeler *Tutshi*, Herman's option was fly for himself.

Herman's first plane based in Atlin was an Aeronca Sedan. This aircraft could carry two passengers or according to Doris, "one passenger and a load of gear." Initially called *Peterson's Flying Service*, this was the predecessor of his later air service *Coast Range Airways*. These air services were the first of their kind to be based in Atlin. Herman brought with him the mail contract and his first job was flying the mail from Atlin to Telegraph Creek.

In 1950, a road extension from the Alaska Highway to Atlin was completed. George Simmons believed this would seriously hurt Herman's business. Indeed, during these early years, Herman's new flying business had its problems, but not because of the road. In fact, three major flying accidents were soon to hit Herman's air service.

While flying alone, Herman lost the Aeronca Sedan in 1952 in a weather related accident at Raspberry Creek, south of Telegraph Creek. Herman survived the crash unhurt, but had to walk six days with a 60-pound packsack "*full of grub*" back to Telegraph Creek.

To replace the Aeronca, Herman bought the a Fairchild 71, (CF-AWV) and later added a Cessna 180 to his fleet.

These two aircraft were also to suffer accidents, the Cessna 180 the company's only fatal, and the Fairchild, after it had been sold, and was ferrying to its new owner.

The Cessna 180 was lost north of Telegraph Creek. It was caught in a freak downdraft, crashed and burned. All on board were killed; including the Cessna 180 pilot and passengers, Dr. Engel (Geological Survey of Canada) and a man from Consolidated Mining and Smelting.

A second aircraft working nearby Telegraph Creek, and piloted by Bob Ellis, saw smoke coming from where the Cessna 180 had just crashed. Bob flew his plane to check out the smoke, but when doing so his plane was caught in the same freak downdraft and crashed too. Fortunately, for Bob, he and his passenger escaped with their lives.

Herman recalls the fatal Cessna 180 accident; "*I was seriously thinking of getting out of the business then. You get over these things, but you never really get over it.*"

The worst accident for Herman in which he was the pilot, happened in a Northern Airways Fairchild in 1948 near Watson Lake. The accident was caused by a rudder structural

malfunction while cruising in straight flight. Herman, who was flying the aircraft, miraculously saved the life of his passenger as well as his own, by spiraling down into a small beaver pond-swamp. Alone in the bush for a few days, a Canadian Pacific Airways DC-3 flight attendant, looking out of a window, saw Herman's smoke signal. She saved the day. After that, Herman and his passenger were quickly rescued.

During the mid-1950's the north's economy began to pick up. In 1956, Herman bought his first de Havilland Beaver. In 1960, Herman's favorite aircraft, a de Havilland Otter was added to the fleet.

The northern economy improved further. By the summer of 1966 the Atlin based *Coast Range Airways* (the new company name) consisted of one Otter, 2 Beavers, 1 Cessna 180, a Super Cub and a Bell 47-G4 helicopter, with a new Jet Ranger helicopter on order. Until that time, Herman would keep all his aircraft moored on First Island, but during 1966 moved into the bay by the Taku River First Nations village.

In 1967, Herman and Doris made the decision to sell their operators license and all aircraft of *Coast Range Airways* to a new northern company, *Trans North*. It was a wise decision. The Northwest BC and Yukon exploration mineral boom was about to peak around 1970. After that, mineral exploration in the Yukon and Northwest BC was to decline, and with the exception of a few rallies in the 1980's and 1990's, it would eventually come to a very depressed state as it is today.

Herman surrendered his commercial license soon after selling *Coast Range Airways*, but did not stop flying. He had built a Smith Miniplane, CF-RKN, (nicknamed Suzy) between 1963-1967. In addition, for pleasure and local fishing trips, Herman bought a modified Luscombe Silvaire 8A floatplane (CF-YHQ) powered by a 150 hp Lycoming.

Herman flew these aircraft on his private pilot license. In 1980, Herman bought a second Luscombe Silvaire 8E (CF-EYF) which he sold the same year to this writer, Clive Aspinall of Atlin. Herman does not fly anymore, but still loves to own and 'tinker' with his two small airplanes.

During his 25-year flying career in the North, Herman built up a sound reputation as a northern bush pilot. He was, (and still is) a friend to all. All people working in the bush during Herman's 25-year flying career knew they could trust and depend on Herman, no matter what the weather conditions. Herman instilled confidence in people; he would look after them while in the bush.

There was something else which built up Herman's reputation in the north. People of the north always want their mail on time. While operating for the Post service between Atlin and Telegraph Creek for a period of 25 years, Herman always ensured mail was delivered with minimum of delay. In fact, after a quarter century of flying the mail between Atlin-Telegraph Creek (and sometimes with extensions to Iskut and Tulsequah) Herman never lost a single letter and never lost a day of delivery, even during winter months.

Herman was always ready to "talk flying" with anyone who came to his front door. Herman loved talking about flying to anyone interested hearing about his flying experiences. He has logged an estimated 17,000 hours of northern bush flying. One can learn a great deal about

flying in the Yukon and NW British Columbia when listening to Herman. One can learn all the details of Herman's northern flying business from Doris too, who loves to join these discussions.

Today, Herman resides in the Copper Ridge Centre (*in Whitehorse*) and Doris lives in Whitehorse.

As a tribute to Herman's accomplishments and service to the Yukon and NW-BC, the Atlin Airport has been officially named the *Peterson Field*.

### **Herman and Suzy During Take-Off**



**Photo Courtesy Clarence Tingley**

**YUKON TRANSPORTATION HALL OF FAME  
2003 TRANSPORTATION PIONEER OF THE YEAR  
HERMAN PETERSON**

Clive & Julie Aspinall, Donna Hall and Beth King nominated Herman into the 2003 Yukon Transportation Hall of Fame on November 12, 2002.

On June 4, 2003 in Whitehorse, Yukon Herman was honored by a large contingent from the Atlin community and Yukoners alike.

Doris received a standing ovation when she talked about their early lives together and how their later years brought them to this day.

Bob Cameron of Whitehorse aptly describes the thoughts of all who know Herman. Bob was quoted in a recent book chapter, "Herman Peterson: The Last of the Great Bush Pilots ... Herman is a national treasure ...."

**Herman Peterson  
CF-AAM on tour, Atlin Airport  
Crewed on sistership for Northern Airways**



**Photo sent by Anne Pritchard, Transport Services  
Department of Highways & Public Works**