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(Ed. Note: This is one of the feature articles in The Whitehorse Star's Tourist Edition, 1970, and is written by Jeanne Harbottle of Whitehorse, author of the book "Woman in the Bush".)

BUSH FLYING IN THE YUKON TERRITORY

(Jeanne Harbottle, November 22, 2003 gave this article to the Moccasin Telegraph. Jeanne is now living in Vernon, BC. Permission to use, also received from Jackie Pierce of the Whitehorse Star.)

I think 1954 was the final year of true bush flying in the Yukon. Until then, airfields were almost nil, and most of those too short and rough. Only along the Alaska Highway were the fields maintained and equipped with radio range. Thirty Miles out of Whitehorse, radio contact was nearly impossible. Only the trading posts (through the courtesy of Army Signals) had contact with aircraft and towns.

Weather reports were sketchy and applied only locally. What lay between A and B could be snow squalls, severe turbulence, stratus or icing. Too true the old saying, "Flying by the seat of your pants."

But from 1927 to 1954 many men were dedicated to flying. Not just pilots, but businessmen, engineers, and those with an eye to the future. All have contributed to the Yukon's heritage.

Many of the early pioneers are gone, but some are still with us and a few are still flying.

CLYDE WAS FIRST

The late Clyde Wann operated the first commercial (air service) airline in the Yukon. Although many aircraft had flown in the territory, there were no commercial operators.

In 1927 Andy Cruickshank flew the first commercial airplane from Skagway to Whitehorse and delivered it to Yukon Airways and Exploration Company. It was the "Queen of the Yukon" sister ship to Lindbergh's "Spirit of St. Louis". A Ryan B-1, G-CAHR. Clyde Wann and his partner Jim Finnegan were in business. Andy had resigned from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Mayo to join the company and was its first pilot.

Queen of the Yukon



Photo courtesy Jeanne Harbottle

Names as reported by Bob Cameron, (L to R) J.E. Smith (Mechanic), Bill Monday (Pilot for Ryan), Andy Cruickshank and Clyde Wann - delivery taking of their new Ryan Brougham "Queen of the Yukon".

G.I. Cameron, a brother "Mountie" made the first aircraft rescue in the Yukon, finding Cruickshank on the trail between Elsa (Carmacks) and Mayo. He had been forced down with a frozen oil line and the temperature was 50 below. Cruickshank had started walking when Cam met him on the trail with his dog team.

Andy left the company in the early part of January 1928 and joined Western Canada Airways. He was killed when he crashed in 1932 near Fort Rae, N.W.T.

T.G. Stephens was the next pilot on the Queen #1 and crashed on the Whitehorse airport May 5, 1928. There were no serious injuries to the three (two?) passengers but the Queen was a write-off Stephens then left the north.

The company purchased a new Whirlwind-motored Alexander Eaglerock biplane, G-CAUZ and hired J. M. Patterson as pilot. Clyde, flying with Patterson as a passenger from Whitehorse to Mayo, escaped injury when Patterson crashed the Eaglerock at Tantalus Lake near Carmacks. So another aircraft was written off on October 2, 1928 (Nov 29, 1929).

The company brought in another Queen, number 2, CF-AHD. All went well until November 2, 1929 when Patterson, flying alone, crashed through the ice on the Stewart River at Mayo and was killed.

AIRMAIL FLIGHTS

The development of airmail services was an unexpected but lucrative addition to the income of the commercial aviation companies. Canada was one of the few countries to grant authority to private contractors and carriers to impose surcharges for carrying mail by air. These companies were given permission to issue special stamps or vignettes.

So Clyde Wann's Yukon Airways and Exploration Co. was issued one S-O Stamp. The first was October 24 – November 1, 1927 Whitehorse, then Mayo Landing- Dawson- Werneck- Keno Hill followed on November 11, 1927. Weather conditions were bad that day Mrs. Cruickshank dropped the mailbag, containing 21 letters while the "Queen" circled low over Dawson. The plane then continued the 500-mile trip to Mayo covering the distance in four and one half hours. By dog team it would have taken a fortnight. The company continued operation until 1933.

(See separate article for April 13, 1928 first flight to Carcross and Atlin. – Sherron)

KLONDIKE AIRWAYS STARTS

In the winter of 1927 T.C. Richards (Burn's meat man) and W.L. Phelps (lawyer and owner of Yukon Electrical Co.) formed Klondike Airways Ltd. And operated cats and sleighs on the overland trail. The name implied they hoped to fly the route at a later date, which they must have done. (They never did.)

In 1928, the 19th of September (11th of October), the Register of Canadian Civil Aircraft shows the owner of a Fairchild, FC2W2—G-CARM as W. L. Phelps, Whitehorse. Klondike Airways Ltd. Owned a DeHavilland 60x Moth (G-CAUM). In March of 1929 (Oct 23rd, 1928) it was transferred to W.L. Phelps, usual base at Whitehorse, Yukon.

This aircraft was written off January 21, 1950. Ev Wassen was the pilot, and later joined British Yukon Air Service, part and parcel of British Yukon Navigation and White Pass. The usual assumption is that Treadwell Yukon owned these aircraft and leased them to Klondike Airways. However, an official A.O. stamp was issued to the company, Klondike Airways (first flight, October 13, 1928, Whitehorse, Wernecke, Keno, Mayo Landing.) It is reported the company stamp was a pale blue and very rare, but who printed them still remains a mystery.

Klondike Airways were still operating cats and sleighs in 1938 and possibly later.



Copy of stamp courtesy Barb Aylwin

Jeanne Harbottle has a stamped envelope with this same stamp on it postmarked 29th (month illegible), 1929 Keno.

LOCAL KIDS FLY

Clyde Wann was determined to stay in aviation, though he was never a pilot. In 1933 he returned from the United States, formed another company under the name “Yukon (International) Airways” with a new partner, Karl Muehleisen (Lawrence Muehleisen). They decided to hire local lads Bud Harbottle and Bud Holbrook in 1935 with the intention of teaching them to fly. The two Buds were kept busy in between lessons rebuilding the two remaining Ryans. Which were stored in the old fire hall near the police barracks. Alf Walker, Wann’s engineer was boss.



Delivering mail to Selkirk 1947 Bud Harbottle left.

Photo courtesy Jeanne Harbottle

Just when all was going well and the future looked bright. Karl (Lawrence), flying a Buhl Monoplane (Airsedan) five-place, crashed on the White Pass summit, hitting a snow shed. **All on board were killed, including Frank Holbrook, Bud’s Uncle.** (Actual passenger list is J.H. Muralt, C.C. Larsen and Archie King – all killed. Larsen was involved in the dredging business at Dawson with an Ed Holbrook). (In 1949 Bud Holbrook and a passenger crashed in a Cornell near Thistle Creek, Dawson. Pat Callison found them three days later. The passenger lived but Bud was dead.)

Clyde was finished again, and although he maintained his enthusiasm for flying, his commercial flying operations were over. He continued in the background of operators as late as 1960.

In 1931 George Simmons started Northern Airways in Carcross. Pat Callison, Herman Peterson, Art Burt, Frank Burton, Les Cook and Bob Randall among others were some of his pilots. Al Warner, Ron Greenslade and Bob Dellert of PWA also worked for George at one time or another. Some of these men are still around to do some hangar flying and many a tale can you hear.



Clyde Wann in 1967

Photo courtesy Jeanne Harbottle

FIRST VANCOUVER – EDMONTON SCHEDULES

Grant McConachie obtained a dominion charter in 1936 to operate as “Yukon Southern (Air Transport)” in B.C. and Yukon. This was the first scheduled airline from Whitehorse to Vancouver and Edmonton. Yukon Southern also got the mail contract from Vancouver and Edmonton in 1937. (Sheldon Luck flew in the first 600 pounds of mail in a Norseman). (First load was flown from Edmonton to Whitehorse and Dawson by Grant (McConnachie) himself in the float-equipped Ford Trimotor CF-BEP on July 7, 1937).

Sheldon was well known and is still flying, fire fighting with a Canso water bomber. He and his lovely wife Isabell have a fine ranch in Fort St. James and Shel is willing to hangar-fly anytime. At one time he was chief pilot for Canadian Airlines.

SOME BRITISH YUKON DISASTERS

British Yukon (Navigation) Aviation was still very active in the flying business, but mainly in the Yukon. At one time they had the largest passenger plane in Canada, a twin motor bi-plane, “Curtis Condor”, purchased from American Airlines. The Curtis – CF-BQN carried 15 passengers and a crew of three. At the time TCA (Air Canada), was flying Lockheed Electra 10-A’s with ten seats. In the short time BYA operated it had a considerable fleet of aircraft.

Brookwalter (Bookwalter) brought in the first plane, an amphibian bi-plane, (called a Keystone Commuter (aka the “Duck”). This aircraft remained Skagway-based under the White Pass Airways banner and American registry. The first brought onto the Canadian civil registry by BYN Company was a Fairchild 82, CF-AXC), Travelaire (CF-BPV) – CF-AXC and (The company later bought a) Bellanca Air cruiser (CF-BLT) CF-BPV, which crashed at Fox Lake, killing pilot Vaughan Woods. Others were Fairchild 82-CF-AXC and Bellanca Air cruiser CF-BLT.

Yet another Fairchild 82-CF-AXJ crashed in Lake LeBarge killing Jess Rice and one (two passengers – Mike McCallion and D.H. Anderson. Although debris from the aircraft and several mail sacks were found floating on Lake LeBarge, nothing was ever found of the three occupants.) of the McCallion boys. Nothing was ever found of the aircraft or passengers.

Another 82, CF-AXK (AXJ) lost a motor on take-off in Dawson City. The wing hit the trees and pilot Lionel Vines with passenger Ernie Chapman were killed. Both of these tragedies were in 1941. (The lake LeBarge tragedy was on November 9, 1939, and the Dawson crash happened on Jan 31, 1941.)

A Bellanca Air Cruiser, CF-BLT was destroyed in a hangar fire in 1941 (1940), while a Curtis Kingbird CF-BVG, a twin-motor (mono) bi-plane flipped over in a high wind in Mayo. (The boys had labeled the engines Nip and Tuck.)

The Canadian Tri Motor Ford, CF-AZB was written off when some energetic mechanic caught a wing on the hangar door while pulling her out, and broke her back.

Bobby Richards wrecked another Electra. He was dragging the landing strip and fell asleep on the cat. Going through the hangar doors he rode up the fuselage of the 10A making an awful mess. BYN ceased flying in (at the end of) 1941 and sold (all of the aircraft, including) a Boeing 247-D and the Curtis CF-BQN to Canadian Pacific Airlines (McConnachie's Yukon Southern Air Transport).

Yukon Southern was also sold in the spring of 1941(2) to the CPR, which in turn formed the company "Canadian Pacific Airlines" and Grant McConachie was made president. Grant is now gone, and the airline is now CP Air. (*Now Air Canada*).

CPA stayed in bush flying as long as possible, but as was the case with other airlines, found that it could not operate a bush operation and a scheduled airline efficiently so kept only the latter; this left Whitehorse without a flying service.

POST WAR AVIATION

In 1946 Bud Harbottle and Norm Hartnell started another flying service in Whitehorse. After a great deal of red tape, they were given an Air Transport Certificate to operate the company now called "Yukon Airways" with a new four-place Republic Seabee, CF-FOW. Bud flew FOW on skis in the winter. Harry Weiland was the engineer.

George Milne started the "Whitehorse Flying School" shortly after Yukon Airways were operating. Gordon Cameron, who had been apprentice engineer for White Pass and CPA got his (AME Aircraft Maintenance Engineer) M-license and joined George, who was also an ex CPA pilot. The competition was too much, and both companies were pretty hungry.

In 1949 after a long struggle and getting nowhere, Yukon Airways and Whitehorse Flying School amalgamated under the name "Whitehorse Flying Services". (Eventually), Weiland and Hartnell left the company, leaving Bud Harbottle and George Milne, pilots, Gordon Cameron, engineer (later commissioner of the Yukon).

The company flourished. A Fleet Canuck, CF-DPM, probably the best-known aircraft in the country, was flown by many Yukoners: Moe Grant, Gordon Dickson, Gordon Cameron, Jeanne Harbottle, Bud Harbottle, Norm Hartnel, Harry Gordon-Cooper, George Milne, Red Challand, Slim McMillan and numerous others. It was sold to Gordon Dickson.

With five small aircraft, to start, they sold a Cessna 140, CF-ELW, a Piper (Super) Cruiser, CF-FTK, A Seabee, CF-FOW and Aeronca Sedan CF-FNY. They then purchased a Norseman, MKH and a Fairchild 71, CF-BXH from Simmons' Northern Airways at Carcross (in April of 1950, effectively putting Northern Airways out of business).

Business kept improving and in the summer of 1949 they bought out Northern Airways. Their pilots Pat Callison and Herman Peterson went off to start their own businesses. Pat to Dawson started Coast Airways (Callison Flying Services) and Herman to Atlin. While Al Warner, engineer for Simmons went to Atlin to work in the mines.

TROUBLE, TROUBLE

Selling the smaller aircraft, (in 1950), they operated the 71 Norseman, Fleet and Stinson, CF-FJY. Then in (the same year) they purchased the first De Havilland Beaver to be flown in the Yukon, CF-FHA.

All three got into trouble at the same time. With a load of groceries for a survey company, Norm took off in the 71, which caught fire in the air. He landed on Quiet Lake and the aircraft burned to the ground. He had run up on the beach, but could not put out the fire.

Bud took the same load and landed at Ross River for fuel. He was taxiing downstream when he ran into a cable unknown to him, which had been strung across the river. Although he tried to pull the aircraft along by hand, the current finally swung the plane, putting one wing under water and over she went. Luckily Bud was free and went hand over hand to the far shore of the Pelly River on the Ross River side. He was badly skinned from the cable and the plane was a write-off.

Bud radioed in to Whitehorse on Army Signals (VEY) where George was informed of the loss and immediately loaded the Beaver with more supplies. He told Bud he would take them north and pick Bud up on the way back.

Three days later there was no sign of George. Pat Callison was taking out a crew north of the McMillan and saw an airplane shining high and dry in the buck brush. George had over shot the lake and ended up in the weeks. Pat landed and with the help of the men he

had with him, got the Beaver back in the lake without a scratch on it. “However” Bud says, “business was sure bad for awhile.”

In 1951 they sold the Norseman (Mk V Norseman purchased in the spring and sold in the fall) and purchased a Cessna 180 CF-EOO, and another Beaver CF-GCY. With the two Beavers and the 180 they flew steadily. Granted good contracts with the Geological (Topographical) Survey, the mail run to Carmacks, into Selkirk and the wild influx of mining men, business boomed.

GEORGE MILNE GOES MISSING

In 1954, George Milne was killed in October in CF-FHA enroute to Ross River. He had four (3 passengers) on board and all died. The search was extensive.

On Tuesday night, four days after he was missing, the survey crews on VanGorda Mountain were lining up claims when they saw a huge fire. They took a fix on it and reported it to the search master of the Royal Canadian Air Force. They were sure it was a gas fire, which had occurred just at dark.

All hopes were raised, thinking George had burnt the aircraft or fuel to attract attention. However, it was another five days before the aircraft was found there was no sign of life.

Everyone in Whitehorse wanted to help. Businessmen, friends, Mounties, and all who could, went as spotters. Every bush pilot in the country gave some of his time to the search. It was a bad period. There must have been a hundred calls a day at the office of Whitehorse Flying Service.

The strain was showing on everyone. Bud’s eyes were bloodshot red and he was tired out as were those who stared at thousands of miles of bush, looking for the Beaver.

It was only by accident FHA was ever found. One of the spotters in the Air Force Dakota happened to look back toward the tail of the aircraft as they were coming over the ridge opposite Van Gorda Creek. He was sure he had seen an aircraft. The captain turned and there it was. From the air it looked intact. (Not really - its totally demolished condition is evident from any angle. – Bob Cameron’s comments.) Because of severe turbulence in the draw, the Dakota and the smaller aircraft could not get close enough to have a good look.

Again all hopes were raised. However, when the Hudson’s Bay Co. Sikorsky Helicopter took a ground crew in, it was discovered that all had died on impact and only the inexplicable fire helped solve the tragedy.

George had gone up the wrong pass and his float had hit fifty feet from the top of the mountain. He was making a turn to come out and went into a high-speed stall. The

aircraft was strewn all over the mountain, but even so it looked intact from the air. It was belly up when they got to the scene.

Pacific Western Airlines had been trying to get Whitehorse Flying Services to sell out to them for some time. After George was killed, Bud and Gordon decided this was the best thing to do.

In the spring of 1955 Pacific Western Airlines came to the Yukon and it was the end of an era.

THE WAY IT IS

Tremendous strides have taken place in flying in the Yukon since then. Aircraft have improved and more horsepower and higher performance, longer range and maneuverability, shorter take-offs and landings.

Gone are the hours spent on a calm lake waiting for enough wind to get airborne, the tramping of snow-covered lakes and rivers and ploughing through deep snow and overflow on plank skis that won't budge. Wheels, once hair raising to use, are now used as much as skis and floats.

Today airfields seem to be everywhere. Radio had advanced and seldom is a pilot out of contact with someone. Planes are equipped with ADF-OMNI radar, de-icing boots, autopilot, pressurized cabins and numerous other aids.

In 1954 only airlines flew by "Instrument Flight Regulations" bush planes had to fly by "Visual Flight Rules" which means ground contact at all times and daylight only. Today instrument flying is as common as visual flying.

Those flyers still in the north that remember the old days, and the ones who have retired outside are amazed at the strides made in aviation and its fantastic growth in the Yukon.

But they remember too that other era, and the men who lived it and loved it, and the men who never lived to see today's wonders but made it all possible.