

SeaBee Amphibious Aircraft on Fulton Field (Kamloops, B.C.)



Image of Harry Layton Bray (1921 - 2003) and a SeaBee aircraft of Kamloops Air Services Ltd. on Fulton Field airport (circa late 1940's - early 1950's). Eppler photo.

The Honorable Clarence Decatur Howe, Reconstruction Minister, recommended that licenses be granted Central British Columbia Airways Limited (CBCA), based at Prince George and Fort St. James, B.C. and Kamloops Air Services Limited (KAS), on 26 April 1946.

Kamloops Air Services Limited was incorporated on 27 February 1946.

KAS originally began service to the Kamloops area, in August, with a de Havilland D.H. Cirrus Moth -- G-CAUM, from a base on Paul Lake, due to late delivery of a Republic Seabee. The Paul Lake based aircraft flew to Silence Lake, in the Raft River range, at the request of the Kamloops district forester, A.E. Parlow, shortly after, to retrieve an injured fire-fighter, but the lake was too small for a landing or take-off.

Over a 40 day period in the Fall 1946, Harry Bray and Bob Marcou flew to different fishing and hunting areas to survey possible client needs.

Two men of the International Salmon Commission were flown to Lum Lake at the top of Adams Lake, in October, by the 2 pilots so that these men could float in a rubber dingy, to Adams Lake taking a sockeye salmon survey. (A dam, on the Adams River, 150 feet in length, being 15 feet high, was constructed by the Adams River Development Company in 1908 and was dynamited by the International Pacific Salmon Commission acting on the authority of Federal Department of Fisheries. (VanSun - 04 Jan. 1946 - p. 13 - Fri.))

Also, in October, the firm was asked by the police to see if they could locate a group of hunters west of McLure, to leave immediately for their Washington state home. The camp was located, but the hunters weren't seen.

The first KAS Republic Seabee aircraft (4-seater) landed on Fulton Field airport on the afternoon of 11 December 1946 and was available for viewing during the week.

A 1946 Christmas greeting card of KAS, in the local paper, bore the names of Harry Bray and Bob Marcou.

The Moth became frozen in the Thomson River, and in attempting to break it free, a hole was put in one of its pontoons. The aircraft, wings folded, was loaded on a flat-bed truck of Kamloops Fuel & Transfer, in early January and driven down the Fraser River canyon highway to Sea Island airport for repair. To cross one bridge, the truck tires had to be partially deflated. Harry Bray accompanied the driver, Gordon Battistone. This trip took nearly 24 hours.

The Seabee aircraft was moved possibly to Vancouver, for the winter, as it was returned to service in Kamloops, in late March 1947.

Housing was at a premium after WWII, and Mayor Fred W. Scott, announced (17 July 1946) that living quarters, at Fulton Field, were being made available for 5 families. Mr. & Mrs. Harry Bray and their two children, and two other families lost much of their possessions in a fire of their former R.C.A.F. huts on 13 May 1947.

According to an article in the Vancouver Sun - 14 May 1947, a destination of the Seabee or Moth might be Caverhill Lake, 60miles north of Kamloops, with Harry Bray or Pete Hunting. The Caverhill Lake fishing and hunting camp was run by Bus Ellis, son of Don Ellis, a Kamloops game warden. That same article indicates a camp was being set up by partner, Jack Morrill, of Paul Lake, with the two pilots, Bray and Hunting, on Chehalis Lake, west of Harrison Lake.

Tuesday, 22 July 1947, KAS's Seabee carried 6 containers, holding 2500 fry each, to Bridge Lake for release, by game wardens. Time taken was only 45 minutes from Fulton Field to the lake, a distance of 75 air miles. That afternoon and the next morning, Lac des Roche, Crystal Lake and Grizzly Lake were stocked in this manner.

The de Havilland Cirrus Moth was registered to KAS from 03 August 1946 to 20 November 1947.

The Christmas card, of 1947 had Harry Bray and Pete Hunting named. Hunting replaced Bob Marcou, in the flying, in July 1947.

Advertising, in March 1948, refers to KAS as being at the Hangar at Fulton Field. (This City-owned hangar was originally erected on the south side of a grass or dirt runway, in the area

where the present control tower is, with door facing north, prior to the official opening of Kamloops Airport, 05 August 1939. This City-owned hangar was dismantled and re-erected at the north-east entrance to the airport, with door facing west, during the reconstruction of the airport, Department of Transport or Department of Defense, during WWII.)

KAS was making plans for a non-scheduled weekly service, on Tuesdays, to service the main lodges on Bare, Canim, Mahood, Taweel, Caverhill and Bonaparte lakes, in March 1948.

The company had a silent partner, as well, a Mr. N. McTaggart, of Montreal, a person who Bray had never met. McTaggart and Bob Marcou ceased, as directors in May 1948. At this time, a new director, John Morrill, of Echo Lodge, Paul Lake was added. A barrister, E. Lando, of Vancouver, held a single share since the incorporation of the company.

During the flood of late May 1948, Harry Bray was flying CN Railway officials through the Fraser Canyon to Vancouver, so that they could examine the flooded rail line from the air, in the Fraser Valley. On the return he flew government officials to inspect the dam on Tranquille Lake, but the lake was still frozen. He made flights to some resorts to pick up tourists or to deliver supplies. He reported that he was booked solid for 3 days.

Fulton Field Airport was flooded. (Caused City of Kamloops about \$2000. in extra expenses.)

A Kamloops Flying Club column, in the Kamloops Sentinel, 09 June 1948 mentions that Harry Bray was operating KAS on his own.

Gabby Hayes, a star western comedian, of California, was a guest of Robert Stearn's "Rainbows Unlimited" on Hoopatakw Lake, on the Bonaparte Plateau, north of Fulton Field, during early September 1948.

In October 1948, a KAS Seabee brought an injured hunter, who was suffering from bruises sustained when his horse rolled, from Bridge Lake, to Kamloops, for medical treatment at Royal Inland Hospital.

In January 1949, Mayor James Moffatt, asked Harry Bray to give a short lecture on the established airways lack of interest in the Kamloops airport, at a public meeting, at City Hall. It appeared to be about the lack of navigational aids.

Another camp, High Meadows Fishing Camp, to be operated by Sam Perry and Jack Savage, was being set up in July 1949, on Tranquille Lake. Kamloops Air Services was to service this camp's needs.

In August, celebrity Phil Harris was in the area to fish. Another celebrity, a radio star, Ken Doyle, of the radio show, "Mr. District Attorney" with wife and 3 sons were flown to Caverhill Lake, for 3 days, by KAS.

Canadian Rainbows Unlimited on Hoopatakw Lake, operated by Robert Stearn and his wife, Frances, were subject to a raid by Provincial and R.C.M.P officers for liquor violations and the smuggling of fishing rods, in August. Mr. Stearn was fined. (Article - Kamloops Sentinel - 09 September 1949)

On September 15, 1949, Ald. Greer reported to Kamloops City Council that KAS flew 5365 air-miles for the period of June and July; 10,700 passenger-miles for those same months. For air freight, KAS flew 22,720 pounds in July and 25,000 in August.

On Tuesday, 04 October 1949, a public hearing (more than 12 hours) was held at the Court House, in Kamloops, in the application of Central B.C. Airways Ltd, for a charter commercial service from Kamloops. The Air Transport Board's decision denied a license on 15 November 1949, being a numbered decision 492.

At Kamloops City Council, 03 November 1949, it was authorized to complete the work of creating a float-plane landing base on the Thompson river, adjoining Fulton Field. Atlas Construction Ltd was employed to complete the work.

At a meeting of Kamloops City Council, in January 1950, Ald. George H. Greer reported that KAS carried 596 passengers during 1949.

Kamloops Air Services was sold, for a value of less than the value of the equipment, according to Harry Bray. The new directors of KAS, effective 22 February 1950, were: Karl J. Springer, Toronto, a mining executive, Russell Baker, Kamloops, pilot and R. Douglas, Vancouver, barrister. These men were associated to Central British Columbia Airways Ltd.

Harry Bray said in a letter, March 1989, that KAS held the first scheduled license between Kamloops and Vancouver. He also mentions having Seabee CF-EJF, the first in western Canada, and CF-EJI, purchased from a Trail firm (may be Kootenay Air Services Ltd.), when it was going bankrupt.

In the report of the purchase of KAS, by CBCA, in the Kamloops Sentinel - 27 February 1950, F. Russell Baker says the sale includes 2 Republic Seabee amphibian aircraft. He also said that the maintenance, engineering staff and facilities would be kept at the airport for maintaining the equipment. (CBCA received "non-exclusive use" of the City-owned hangar for monthly rent of \$25, from March 1950. It was permitted to put aircraft in the hangar the previous winter.)

After the sale of KAS, Harry Bray began flying for the new owners, Central B.C. Airways.

There was a collision involving two trains, Tuesday, 21 November 1950, on the Canadian National Railway line, near Canoe River, when a westbound train, carrying Korea-bound soldiers, had incorrect orders and failed to enter a railway siding. It collided with an eastbound Transcontinental passenger train No. 2. Killed were 21 people, the engine crews of both trains and 17 soldiers. 61 persons were injured. The soldiers were of the 2nd Regiment Royal Canadian Horse Artillery.

That afternoon, Kamloops Sentinel reporter, Keith Gagne, and Photomart's Phil Gagne (not related) were in a float plane of Central B.C. Airways piloted by Harry Bray, of the Westsyde area of Kamloops, flying to the accident scene. Due to a storm of high winds and blinding snow, the aircraft had to return to Kamloops, not making it halfway to the accident location.

Early the next morning, Harry Bray, C. Rose, an air engineer, and cameraman Phil Gagne left Fulton Field, to fly over the railway accident to photograph the wreckage as a Toronto Star assignment. From the accident site to Edmonton, their next destination, they experienced some snow storms, and on the ground at Edmonton, temperature was minus 5 degrees Fahrenheit. During the last two hours of the flight, the cabin heater was turned off to conserve fuel. Photo images were transmitted from that city to Toronto.

After staying in Edmonton overnight, they flew to Calgary on Thursday, to take on more fuel, before following the Canadian Pacific Railway line through Kickinghorse Pass. Near Banff, they encountered a snowstorm but pressed on, in difficult conditions, to Sicamous, landing on Shuswap Lake, near darkness, after close to a 5-hour flight. The trio had an uneventful flight from Sicamous to Fulton Field on Friday.

This Kamloops - Edmonton - Calgary - Sicamous - Kamloops flight was in a Central B.C. Airway's Republic Seabee aircraft.

D.F. Granger was appointed liquidator of Kamloops Air Services Ltd, 18 February 1952. A creditors meeting, at which no creditor was present, was held at Prince George, 03 March 1952 and the assets of KAS were distributed to Central British Columbia Airways Limited.

The affairs of KAS were wound up 22 January 1953.

(This portion was researched at the Kamloops Museum Archives.)

#### MacLeod Aircraft Limited - the Dealer

MacLeod Aircraft Limited was incorporated on 18 April 1946. Shareholders of the company were: Earl Leslie MacLeod, retired (ex R,C.A.F.) and Dr. Hugh Alexander MacKechnie, physician, both of Vancouver, B.C. Dr. MacKechnie was a brother-in-law of MacLeod's.

In May 1946, a hold was placed on a lot, at Chilliwack airport, for Air Commodore Earl Macleod, for a period of six months.

A SKY Lines column (VanSun - 02 Nov. 1946) by Ron Thornber, remarks that the Republic Seabee being marketed, by ex- Air Commodore MacLeod was the first of that model of aircraft to appear on the field (Sea Island airport - Vancouver).

A photo (VanSun - 12 April 1947) showed a Seabee amphibian demonstrator owned by ex- Air Commodore MacLeod as an air ambulance, said to be its first test run. The aircraft , equipped with stretcher, oxygen cylinders and blood transfusion equipment was fitted by the Merrill Auto Ambulance Manufacturing Co. The article indicated a regular service of this type would begin with B.C. Air Lines Ltd.

Advertising of the company (VanSun - 28 Apr. 1947) indicated with paying the price of \$8100, one might fly a Republic amphibian aircraft from Vancouver, with full fuel tank, and instruments and other equipment such as a radio, anchor and fire extinguisher.

This firm was the B.C. Distributor for: Republic Seabee Amphibian; Franklin engine and Hartzell Reversible Propeller.

This advertisement also showed the following firms as being Seabee dealers: B.C. Air Lines Ltd., Victoria, B.C.; Brett's Ltd., Chilliwack, B.C.; Kamloops Air Services Ltd., Kamloops, B.C. and Kootenay Air Services Ltd., Trail, B.C.

The last annual report of MacLeod Aircraft filed with the Registrar of Companies was to December 1948.

I was advised by MacLeod's son that his father's Seabee carried registration CF-EJE.

Ex Air Commodore MacLeod (1894 - 1987) was no stranger to water aircraft, as he flew an HS2L aircraft (G-CYEB) into Kamloops and the surrounding areas, on 16 August 1921, for forestry survey aerial work and to aid the setting of triangulation survey sites.

(Researched at the Chilliwack Archives, Royal B.C. Museum Archives, Kamloops Museum and at Thompson Rivers University library.)

Unfortunately, the researcher holds no registration information as to the Republic Seabee aircraft operators of this time period.

### Kamloops Has an Airport

It was in January 1927, that the City of Kamloops received word from the Department of National Defence that sites may be inspected for possible airports. The city was to select sites.

Over the years were inspections by many R.C.A.F. persons. -- A civilian airline company representative inspected two sites in 1929. -- Another possible airport site was suggested in North Kamloops. -- There too was the Stock market crash. -- There was an attempt to lease land on the Kamloops Indian Reserve. -- Another site was considered in late 1930 and a sketch of it drawn. -- With the depression there was a lack of enthusiasm on Council, but an attempt was made to lease land for an airport, but the lease couldn't be registered as the land registry required a re-survey. -- The unfortunate people of the area received over 12,000 meals in the last half of July 1931. -- The city's population was about 6,093 persons. -- The B.C. Air Tour put on an Air Pageant - 13 July 1932. -- A by-law for funds for an airfield didn't muster support of Council in August 1932. -- Canada's economy was at its lowest point in January 1933. -- Federal officials met with Council members on the matter of relief and air in June 1933. -- In 1935, there were the labor camps controlled by the Department of National Defense, constructing roads and airfields across southern B.C. -- In September 1936, Council heard the suggestion of a make work project -- an emergency airfield. -- The creation of Trans-Canada Air Lines (now Air Canada) was given Royal Assent - 10 April 1937. -- "Kamloops Has No Airport" were the headlines of an editorial in the Kamloops Sentinel - 16 July 1937, and continues airports are at Ashcroft, Hope, Grand Forks, Chilliwack and Prince George. -- Radio beams were being installed across southern B.C for Trans-Canada Air Lines. -- Ottawa would buy land for an ammunition depot at Rayleigh. -- Council was back to the situation of leasing, then purchasing land, in Brocklehurst, for an airport.

By 07 April 1938, a lease agreement (45.83 acres), by the property owner (British Columbia Fruit Lands Limited) and the City was signed, and airport development begun 13 April. The landing strip was to be 2840 feet x 180 feet. To receive federal funding for the site development, it had to be owned. The City then passed a bylaw, 02 September 1938 for the purchase of 77.81 acres at \$2,750.00 and the conveyance signed 08 September. The City of Kamloops was granted a temporary airport license, by telegram, 15 December 1938. A photo taken on the airport, looking east towards Mt. Paul and Peter, appeared in the Vancouver Sun - 24 December 1938.

(This original airport lies within the present airport - "Kamloops Airport on Fulton Field.")

The year 2018, marks the Eightieth (80) year of a licensed airport in Kamloops.

Research - Neil G. Burton - 22 September 2018.