

September - October 2016 Issue

Lois Winifred Argue: The First RCAF (WD) at Blatchford Field

By Erin Hoar

EDITOR'S NOTE: In 2013, an oral history project was launched by the Alberta Aviation Museum with the goal of preserving the stories of people who made aviation history at Blatchford Field. One of the interviews recorded was with Lois W. Argue, born on December 12, 1920, and who is now 95 years of age. During the interview, Lois recalled the time that she spent with the No. 2 Air Observers School (AOS) and her story has helped to describe what life was like at Hangar 14 during wartime.



Figure 1 - Cpl. Lois Argue on the Steps of the Alberta Legislature Building, 1943
(Alberta Aviation Museum Collection)

In addition, the museum's archives holds the Lois Argue collection of photographs, documents, books and artifacts that she collected during the war years. They were instrumental in helping put this article together.

Lois Argue was living in Regina, Saskatchewan, when she first heard news of the outbreak of the Second World War. Her first thought was to enlist, and soon after she did, she was sent to Toronto for medical training with the Royal Canadian Air Force Women's Division (RCAF WD). Once her training was complete, Lois was stationed in Manitoba and Saskatchewan before being sent to Edmonton in early 1942.

Arriving in Edmonton as the first female from the RCAF Women's Division, Lois's job was to provide medical services to the men and women who came through the No. 2 AOS. Lois says she "didn't give a darn" that she was the only female there, as she was there to work hard and get the job done. Lois worked and lived in barracks alone for about a year before other women were posted to No. 2 AOS to work alongside her.

She kept busy by assisting doctors, giving medical tests to men and women, filling out admission paperwork, screening new recruits, completing reports and answering questions. Lois remembers that some days, she would administer up to 300 inoculations before noon.

Lois had responsibilities in the medical, dental and hospital divisions, but since she had been with No. 2 AOS from early on, she became the go-to person for whatever was needed. This included sewing badges on uniforms, attending airmen graduations, processing discharges and forwarding possessions to the families of people who did not return from overseas. She would also assist with retrieving recruits who went absent without leave and tended to airmen who were contemplating suicide. Her duties were varied, but show the trust that she was given by management and colleagues.

Hangar 14 was a hub of activity during the war. According to Lois, it was an "awful busy place" and she didn't think she "ever went to bed." During this time, the Alaska Highway was also being built and this meant that buildings were shared with the Americans based at the Edmonton airport. Part of Lois's responsibilities were to help coordinate operations for the people working up north. She remained on-call for emergencies, sent supplies to northern stations, diverted planes in severe weather and sent ambulances to the tarmac for returning airmen who required medical care. All this made for a full work load, but Lois remembers that it wasn't all work. The social life during this time was huge and on dance night, "the whole Hangar was jammed full."

The Second World War gave Lois the opportunity to travel, and looking back, she thinks she would have never even made it to Edmonton from Regina if it hadn't been for the war. For her, it wasn't hard to be away from home and describes the adventure as just natural for her. Before joining the military, Lois had never been on an airplane, but once in the RCAF WD, she went on trips with pilots and travelled up north with the doctors. The first flight she ever went on was to northern Manitoba.

Lois had a keen interest in photography and she took many photos which documented her time in the RCAF Woman's Division at Blatchford Field. There are many photos in her collection that are of herself, sometimes in uniform or flying kit next to an Avro Anson, but she also took many



*Figure 2 - Lois Argue at Blatchford Field, 1943
(Alberta Aviation Museum Collection)*

photos of her friends, other air force men and women, aircraft and the buildings at the airport base. Lois has stated that there are probably hundreds of pictures of her in and around various aircraft. Lois had a number of her photographs mounted and framed, which remain on display in the aviation museum's volunteer lounge. Many of Lois's photos and other items have been on display over the years for museum visitors to see.

The few years that Lois was based out of Hangar 14 became very memorable for her. Later in life, she became a volunteer with the museum and describes returning to the Hangar as "like going home." The building was home to thousands of air men and women who passed through Hangar 14 under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP).



Figure 3 - Lois in a Camera Shop, 1959
(Alberta Aviation Museum Collection)

The Alberta Aviation Museum now resides in Hangar 14 and is fortunate to be able to display artifacts, photographs and stories from this period in history. Stories, such as the one from Lois Argue, show how necessary it is to preserve these experiences for the future.

The video of Lois Argue's interview with the Museum's Oral History project is available at: https://youtu.be/wjD7_cwpaCo



Figure 4 - Erin Hoar (John Liddle Collection)

Sources:

Alberta Aviation Museum. Lois Argue Collection (accessed August 11, 2016).

Alberta Aviation Museum. Lois Argue - Interviewed June 12, 2014, Oral History Project.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Erin is a former volunteer with the Alberta Aviation Museum and now works full time as the museum's Assistant Executive Director and Assistant Curator.

Erin graduated in 2013 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in History from MacEwan University. She has also completed a Business Administration Diploma from NAIT with a specialization in Management. She is currently taking the Cultural Resource Management program through the University of Victoria.

Ford Trimotor G-CARC: An Aircraft with a Rich Past

By Neil Taylor

EDITOR'S NOTE: In the annals of aviation history, a handful of aircraft are remembered by name because of their affiliation with great aviation events. The Silver Dart, the Spirit of St. Louis, the Enola Gay, are all revered as technological marvels that made daring new aeronautic feats possible. But away from the media spotlight, countless other aircraft toiled in relative obscurity despite their affiliation with important aviation milestones. This story is about one such aircraft – Ford Trimotor G-CARC – and its ties with some of the early aviation greats.

In the post-First World War period, entrepreneurs and corporations began to recognize the advantages that aircraft brought to the movement of goods and people. But the war surplus biplanes could not fill this need, and ever more advanced aircraft designs began to appear.

In the United States the duo of Henry and Edsel Ford, renowned developers of the assembly line and the Model T Ford, which brought the gift of mobility to the common man, were also fascinated by aviation. They were among the first to recognize the potential of air travel - moving large numbers of people great distances in a fraction of the time required by the automobile or train.

In 1924 the Fords purchased several all-metal aircraft designed by Bill Stout, a brilliant engineer. These aircraft, the single engine 2-AT Air Transport or Stout Air Pullman, carried eight passengers in relative comfort, and in 1925 they became the workhorse of the newly formed Ford Air Transportation Service – the world's first regularly scheduled commercial cargo airline. By 1925 the Fords were so enamoured with these aircraft that they purchased the manufacturer and incorporated it within the Ford Motor Company as the Stout Metal Airplane Division.

Desiring more power and greater passenger capacity, the Fords decided to turn the single engine 2-AT into a three engine 4-AT, with one engine in the nose of the aircraft and two others hung below the wings. Initially designed with an open cockpit, the 4-AT was soon converted to an enclosed model in order to protect the pilots from inclement weather. This aircraft, which came to be called the Ford Trimotor, was the largest commercial transport aircraft of its time, capable of carrying two pilots and eight to twelve passengers 550 miles without refueling. Ultimately over 100 airlines worldwide flew the Ford Trimotor.

Seventy-nine 4-ATs, and later another 121 5-ATs, were constructed between 1926 and 1933. Of these aircraft, 4-AT-10 (the 10 denoting the construction number) could lay claim to being the most important Ford Trimotor produced given the succession of aviation pioneers and innovators who owned it or flew it.

NC-1077 and Charles Lindbergh

Ford Trimotor 4-AT-10 rolled out of the factory for the first time on September 15, 1926 and was assigned the American registration, NC-1077. The aircraft was first utilized in a testing capacity by Bill Stout and the Fords although it was pressed into service to fly one overnight trip to Indianapolis on behalf of Maddux Airlines.

The Fords were anxious to promote their new Trimotor aircraft, and Bill Stout came up with an ideal promotional scheme. Charles Lindbergh, flying the *Spirit of St. Louis*, had become the first person to fly a solo non-stop transatlantic flight on May 20-21, 1927, and he was an immediate media sensation. Upon returning to the United States, he embarked on a 92 city American tour flying the *Spirit of St. Louis*. The tour lasted from July to October, 1927.

At the request of the U.S. government, Lindbergh next headed south on a tour of Latin America, again at the controls of the *Spirit of St. Louis*. The tour commenced on December 13, 1927 with its first stops in Mexico.

Bill Stout watched the media frenzy around Lindbergh with envy and hit upon the idea of flying Lindbergh's mother, Mrs. Evangeline Lindbergh, who happened to live in Detroit, to Mexico to spend Christmas with her famous son. The airplane Bill Stout planned to use was the Ford Trimotor, and he expected the publicity flight would help accelerate sales of the new aircraft.

After convincing the Fords and the Lindberghs to participate in the venture, and with the reluctant support of the U.S. State Department, Stout made the arrangements to have Mrs. Lindbergh flown south aboard Ford Trimotor NC-1077. Departure took place on December 19th, and covered 2,055 miles in just under 22 hours. Mrs. Lindbergh arrived to tumultuous crowds, and the Ford Trimotor became the largest airplane to have ever visited Mexico.

For the next six days, including Christmas, Mrs. Lindbergh was able to enjoy time with her famous son, while NC-1077 embarked on a series of sightseeing tours. Included on the passenger lists were the President of Mexico and several of his government officials. Charles Lindbergh himself got behind the controls and took embassy officials and their families on an airborne tour of Mexico City. One of his passengers was Anne Morrow, the daughter of the American Ambassador to Mexico, and just eighteen months later she and Charles were wed.



Figure 5 - Ford Trimotor NC-1077 on Bremen Rescue Mission, 1928
(Boston Public Library Collection)

The Bremen Rescue Mission

NC-1077's next great adventure took place in response to the first flight across the Atlantic from east to west on April 12-13, 1928. The *Bremen*, a Junkers W.33, had a three man crew including: the pilot, Captain Hermann Köhl; the navigator, Major James Fitzmaurice; and, the aircraft owner, Freiherr von Hünefeld. It completed the crossing in 36 hours but became stranded upon landing on tiny Greenly Island located in the Strait of Belle Isle between Newfoundland and Quebec.

The *Bremen* had been damaged upon landing, badly needed fuel and required other supplies to leave the island, but while several

aircraft were dispatched on a relief mission, none were large enough to ferry the quantity of supplies needed by Köhl and his other crew members.

Once again Edsel Ford stepped forward to make his Trimotor, NC-1077, available for the airlift. Floyd Bennett and Bernt Balchen, members of Admiral Richard E. Byrd's 1926 Arctic expedition, were recruited to fly the Trimotor to Greenly Island. Both were violently ill, however, to the extent that they diverted to Quebec City where Bennett was admitted to hospital. He died of pneumonia two days later. Balchen and NC-1077 continued on to Greenly Island where he met up with the stranded crew of the *Bremen*. Repairs to the Junkers were unsuccessful so it was decided that Balchen would fly out the Bremen crew in NC-1077. This was done over a two day period commencing April 16, 1928 and during the ferrying operation all members of the *Bremen* crew took turns flying the Trimotor, adding their names to the growing impressive roster of aviators who had piloted NC-1077.

After completing this rescue mission, NC-1077 was returned to the Ford factory for repairs and alterations. As part of the work order, NC-1077's skis were removed and installed on Admiral Byrd's own Ford Trimotor – the *Floyd Bennett* – which he and Bernt Balchen then took to Antarctica and flew over the South Pole.

Sky View Lines and the Move to Canada

Meanwhile, NC-1077 was purchased by Sky View Air Lines on May 21, 1928 to fly sightseeing tours over Niagara Falls. The principal investor in Sky View was Sir Harry Oakes of Chippewa, Ontario. Oakes was a multi-millionaire who had participated in the Klondyke gold rush, but who



Figure 6 - Sky View Lines' Ford Trimotor circa 1928
(T.K. Temple Collection, 1000aircraftphotos.com)

made his fortune with the discovery of the rich Lakeshore Mine on Kirkland Lake in northern Ontario.

Based at Oakes Field on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls, NC-1077 received the Canadian registration, G-CARC. The aircraft was remodeled to carry additional passengers, twelve in all, and in recognition of its

already historic roots, the Trimotor had the following promotional messages painted on its side: "This machine flew Mrs. Lindbergh to Mexico" and "This machine flew to the rescue of the *Bremen* crew". The flights and the aircraft were an immediate success: according to a Sky View Lines promotional advertisement, during the 1928 season it flew 12,000 passengers over Niagara Falls.

In addition to flying out of Oakes Field, tours were also staged from Buffalo, New York, and in March 1929, the Ford Trimotor was dispatched by Sky View to pick up another famed aviator – Amelia Earhart. She was to attend the Buffalo Aviation Show, so G-CARC was sent to

Rochester to fetch her. On the return trip to Buffalo, Ms. Earhart took her turn at the controls and is reported to have found the large aircraft to be much to her liking.

For three years G-CARC flew sightseers over Niagara Falls but as the Great Depression worsened traffic fell off and the large Ford Trimotor was parked at Oakes Field. It had not, however, escaped the attention of one man – Edmonton's own Grant McConachie.

McConachie Purchases NC-1077/G-CARC

Grant McConachie, a brash, young entrepreneur and aviator, had established United Air Transport in 1933 with the backing of Barney Phillips, the son of the owner of the Two Brothers gold mine in British Columbia. McConachie had been supplying the mine through his earlier company, Independent Airways.

United Air Transport started operations with two Fokkers (G-CAHE and G-CAHJ) that had belonged to the defunct Explorers Air Transport. A third Fokker (G-CABJ) was added and by the winter of 1933-34 McConachie had all three aircraft busily hauling fish from Peter Pond Lake to the railhead at Cheecham. In the summer months, the aircraft continued to haul equipment and supplies into the Two Brothers mine, but young McConachie was eager to expand his aerial operations. This was when he cast his eye on the big Ford Trimotor belonging to Sir Harry Oakes.

McConachie tried to negotiate countless deals but it was only when he appealed to Oakes' past experiences working in the bush and the hardships he faced before the advent of the bush plane, that he finally made progress. Although the Trimotor was listed for sale at fifty-five thousand dollars, McConachie managed to cajole Oakes into taking all the money he had available – twenty-five hundred dollars! For this low sum McConachie had just acquired the largest commercial airplane in Canada.

McConachie immediately put the Trimotor to work hauling fish – each flight he managed to pack the aircraft's cabin with forty-five sacks of fish weighing 3,600 pounds, a full 1,600 pounds



*Figure 7 - United Air Transport's Ford Trimotor G-CARC circa 1934-35
(Alberta Aviation Museum Collection)*

over the top weight assigned to the aircraft. G-CARC working in concert with the Fokkers managed to haul an astounding million pounds of fish during the winter of 1934-35.

But fish wasn't the only cargo McConachie had in mind for the Trimotor – he was also interested in commercial passenger traffic, so in May 1935 he cheerfully agreed to fly a single person, Bob Wilkinson, by charter in G-CARC from Calgary to

Vancouver. The flight had its share of incidents including dense cloud conditions over the Rockies which forced McConachie to put down in Grand Forks, BC, but eventually they made it to Vancouver to a hero's welcome. The feat netted McConachie priceless publicity as it marked the first commercial flight over the mountains to Vancouver.

McConachie also promoted the Trimotor as the "The Largest Aircraft in Canada" during a whirlwind tour of country fairs in the Canadian West, where he charged the locals to take sightseeing trips.

Despite the favourable publicity he received from his exploits flying the Ford Trimotor, the giant aircraft had one drawback – this model was not designed for operation on floats, a major detriment to bush flying operations. So McConachie sought a way to dispose of G-CARC, and he found a willing taker in George Simmons of Northern Airways based at Carcross, Yukon.

The Trimotor had been flown hard during the McConachie years and was in rough shape but Grant once again utilized his adept negotiating skills and daring flying to convince George Simmons to purchase the aircraft. One of the conditions of sale was a demonstration flight with a full load of cargo. McConachie readily agreed, and it was arranged to haul a load of freight plus two trappers and their eight sled dogs from Atlin to Carcross.



*Figure 8 - G-CARC at Blatchford Field
(Alberta Aviation Museum Collection)*

During the take-off run from the ice on Atlin Lake, the dogs broke loose and scurried to the rear of the airplane, the two trappers in hot pursuit. Barely aloft, G-CARC immediately assumed a tail heavy position and threatened to stall. McConachie cranked the trim control to full nose down and jammed the engine throttles open. As the airspeed continued to fall, McConachie ordered Simmons to do something. George dived into the back and dragged the two trappers into the cockpit. The added weight at the front finally brought the nose down and increased their flying speed. Disaster was averted and once the aircraft was safely on the ground, Simmons turned to McConachie and exclaimed, "If you're planning any more demonstrations like that forget it. You've sold me. It's a deal. Shake."

George Simmons was a no nonsense, hard driving individual, typical of those who flew up north. With Bob Randall, one of his best pilots, often at the wheel, Simmons put G-CARC through its paces hauling freight and passengers. Unfortunately for G-CARC, a hard landing at Telegraph Creek on November 21, 1936 buckled the fuselage, but it still managed to fly on until finally grounded by Canadian aviation inspectors in Carcross in August 1937. Over time scavengers and others stripped off pieces of the airplane for other uses, and the aircraft slowly deteriorated, unwanted and unloved.

A New Lease on Life for NC-1077/G-CARC

In 1956, Gene Frank of Caldwell, Idaho purchased G-CARC and began moving pieces of it stateside; the final pieces crossed the border in 1984. Frank's goal was to restore the Ford Trimotor to its former glory but due to advancing age, he decided to pass it on to Greg Herrick, who found himself in the biggest restoration project of his life.



Figure 9 - NC-1077 at Oshkosh Air Venture, 2010
(Rod Bearden Collection, rod.bearden.com)

NC-1077/G-CARC's pieces were moved to a hangar in Minneapolis where Hov-Aire of Vicksburg, Michigan performed the actual restoration work. Greg Herrick's intent was to restore the historic aircraft to the condition it was in on December 19, 1927, the day Charles Lindbergh's mother departed for Mexico.

Work began in 2000 and was completed in 2004. NC-1077/G-

CARC's exterior now sports the famous Ford logo and the references to the Lindbergh and Bremen trips as Sky View had added them in 1928. Beneath the pilot's window are names of former famous aviators who flew the aircraft during its operational career.

Today NC-1077/G-CARC forms part of Greg Herrick's Golden Wings Flying Museum based at Anoka County Airport in Blaine, Minnesota. It is the world's oldest surviving Ford Trimotor, and the oldest American airliner in airworthy condition. The private collection is not open to the general public, but special tours can be arranged for interested groups.

After an amazing career during which NC-1077/G-CARC crossed paths with some of the greatest aviators and aviation entrepreneurs of the past, it is gratifying to know that it is now in safe hands and has been beautifully restored, a testament to its historic past.

Sources:

Butler, Susan *East to the Dawn: The Life of Amelia Earhart* (Da Capo Press, 2009)

Herrick, Greg *The Amazing Story of America's Oldest Flying Airliner: 1927 Ford Trimotor C-1077, Model 4-AT-A, Serial Number 10* (Yellowstone Aviation Inc., Jackson, Wyoming)

Keith, Ronald A. *Bush Pilot with a Briefcase: The Happy-Go-Lucky Story of Grant McConachie* (Doubleday Canada Ltd., Toronto, ON: 1972)



Figure 10 - NC-1077 at Golden Wings Museum
(Rod Bearden Collection, rod.bearden.com)

Searching for the “Russian Lindbergh”

By Yuri Salnikov, Co-Author Larisa Mikhaylova, English Version Edited by Bil Thuma

A memorial honouring Sigizmund Levanevsky – a Soviet pilot dubbed by the U.S. media in 1937 as the “*Russian Lindbergh*” – was unveiled at the Khrunichev Space Center in 2012 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of his disappearance and death. For decades, Levanevsky has been a symbol of Russian-U.S. cooperation in the aerospace field. The following is a capsule story of the failed mission and our efforts to solve the mystery or discover where their aircraft may have come to rest in the Arctic waters, near Prudhoe Bay.

Levanevsky and his crew of five went missing somewhere off the northern coast of Alaska as they attempted to make the first cargo-passenger flight from Moscow to the ‘Lower 48’ via Fairbanks. They were following on the prop wash of two other Russian long distance non-stop flights in June and July 1937, taken in single engine Tupolev ANT-25s which landed near Portland, Oregon (9,130 km in 63 hours and 25 minutes) and California (11,500 km in 62 hours and 17 minutes) respectively.



Figure 11 – N-209 and its Crew

(All Photos Via Archival Research of Salnikov and Mikhaylova)

In this third attempt to make aviation history, their first stop Fairbanks was chosen because, at a distance of 6,650 kilometers from Moscow, it fell within the range of the airplane that Levanevsky would fly— a prototype 4-engine bomber that had been converted into a civilian aircraft, tail number N-209. The aircraft's designers cautioned that the plane was still largely untested, but Soviet pilots had established several records in it and other Soviet aircraft and planned to demonstrate its capabilities to the Americans. A full year was needed to prepare for the flight, but the Soviet official in charge of the project, wanting to curry favor with Josef Stalin, gave Levanevsky only three months.

Unfortunately, under such a tight timeframe, the flight crew never got a chance to gel as a team nor could they correct some engineering flaws apparent in its handling. They made several short training flights, such as a 1,930-kilometer roundtrip from Moscow to Melitopol, Ukraine, but didn't fly 30 hours or more nonstop to test the aircraft's endurance on distances comparable to the Moscow-Fairbanks route. Neither did they fly blind to test the plane in conditions of poor visibility or in severe arctic weather conditions.

All of this made the crew jittery. That is why, as the men set out on August 12, 1937, the crew's radio operator, Nikolai Galkovsky said, half-jokingly, “*We are flying to our deaths.*”

The Historic Flight Begins

In a nation's first, Soviet authorities permitted foreign correspondents based in Moscow to watch the takeoff. The New York Times correspondent posed a sensitive question to Levanevsky, asking: "Mr. Levanevsky, do you feel lucky this time?" referring to an earlier unsuccessful attempt to fly over the North Pole and into America.



Figure 12 - Levanevsky Indicating Intended Destination in Alaska

"I think we were very lucky to be entrusted with this flight," he responded, "and I believe that people will fly this route — with or without us."

At 18:15 Moscow time as evening was descending over the Shchelkovo air base, the red and blue re-purposed Bolkhovitinov DB-A N-209 sprung into the air in only 35 seconds – but to witnesses and the crew, a wisp of smoke trailed the right outboard engine. Engineers predicted that the engine would soon stop smoking but, 19 hours later, the last voice radio message received from the crew referred to the same problem: *"The far-right engine has quit due to a problem with the oil system ... Entering overcast skies ... Elevation 4,600 meters. Will attempt a landing."*

After that partial transmissions were picked up and then one final coded message was received ... **48 3400 92 RL** then only static. 48 3400 92 remains a mystery.

The Search for Levanevsky and N-209

The search began the next day. In Washington, Soviet Ambassador Konstantin Oumansky contacted famed Arctic explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson, who offered to rent three airplanes to fly to Alaska and search along the 148th meridian, which Levanevsky had been following as the plane's route to Fairbanks.

By August 14, two days after the departure from Moscow, three American and one Canadian team started combing the coastal islands of Alaska.

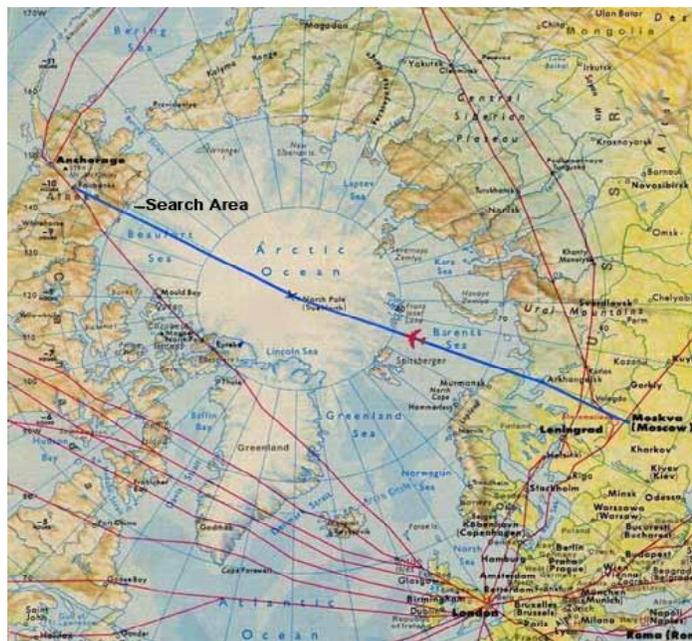


Figure 13 - Planned Route of N-209 from Moscow to Fairbanks, August 12, 1937

Stefansson meanwhile, recruited several outstanding men for his search party, including experienced polar explorer Sir Hubert Wilkins. The Soviet Embassy rented a seaplane, and on August 22, Wilkins and his team flew to Alaska and made five long-range flights toward the North Pole before the Arctic Ocean began to freeze over.

Finding nothing, they returned to New York, where they followed Stefansson's advice and purchased the most modern airplane available, the Lockheed Electra. The crew soon flew back to the Arctic.

Wilkins benefited from a string of clear lunar days with good visibility, but he found nothing. The icebreaker *Krasin* arrived at Point Barrow from Chukotka and delivered several short-range airplanes. The ship was also to act as a radio beacon for two seaplanes. However, the ice soon began closing off all water routes, and the *Krasin* was forced to return to Chukotka with the airplanes.

Many polar pilots speculated that Levanevsky's aircraft iced over, went out of control and crashed into the sea. Others thought they may have veered toward Ellesmere Island or crossed the coast and crashed into the Brook's Range south of the Beaufort Sea coastline.

Polar radio operators and amateur radio buffs from a number of countries reported picking up extremely faint signals thought to be distress calls from Levanevsky's crew several days after N-209 disappeared.

They could have survived. The crew had taken off from Moscow with a six-week supply of food, weapons for hunting, and sleeping bags. Just before takeoff, they also were given bags containing furs to present to the wives of prominent U.S. officials, a barrel of caviar and letters to post in the United States. But for some unexplained reason they left their emergency radio behind.

But finally the search was called off after 9 months. In total, efforts involved 24 Soviet and 7 American and Canadian aircraft, several vessels and land parties combing the shore and mountains. No trace of the airplane or its crew was found.

Levanevsky, one of the first Heroes of the Soviet Union, was only 35 years old at the time of his last flight, and his disappearance shook the world. A year after the tragic event, Soviet pilot Valery Chkalov recalled Levanevsky, saying, "*You see, only death could keep him from his goal. The skies will make us pay dearly for a long time.*" Chkalov himself died several months later while testing a new fighter plane.

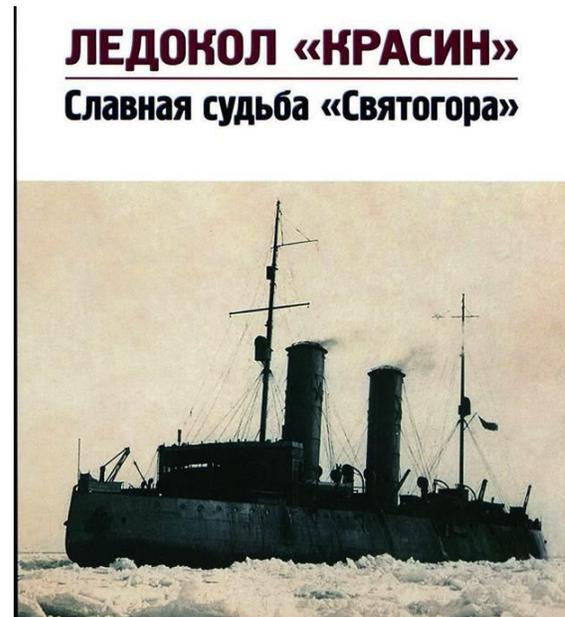


Figure 14 - Icebreaker *Krasin* - One of many Search Vessels Commissioned to Look for N-209

New Clues to the Loss of N-209

In 1989, while working at the U.S. Library of Congress, I was reading old radio messages and found that in the fall of 1937, radio operator Stanley Morgan, who was based at Point Barrow, met with Inupiat natives from Oliktok Point, an area about 250 to 300 kilometers to the east. Looking through binoculars, three Inupiat hunters had seen a large flying machine about 15 kilometers north of the mainland and flying at low altitude. It hit the water, pulled up and then crashed into the sea near the Jones Islands. It was a stormy, rainy evening.

The next day, they boated out to the scene of the accident and found an oil slick. One native, who was also a college student, took note of the incident in his diary. Radioman Morgan informed his superiors of what he had learned.

A year later, a clergyman from California, Homer Kellems, sailed into Barrow on his schooner. Morgan related the story he had heard from the Inupiat, and Kellems used the only tool available to search for the wreckage of the Soviet aircraft— a compass. At one point, a sailor noticed the compass pointing downward and informed Kellems, but he was unable to find anything.

Ice soon began forming near the islands, and Kellems quickly sailed back to California. From there, he wrote a detailed letter describing his efforts to the Soviet Embassy, which in turn forwarded his letter and Morgan's radio message to the Foreign Affairs Commissariat, where the documents were placed in the archives.

Not long after, World War II broke out, and the Levanevsky search was shelved, and memory faded of this valiant attempt to develop air routes over the pole.

What started as a search for the only B-25 that survived intact from Doolittle's raid on Tokyo led WWII veteran, pilot and author Walter Kurilchuk to Russia and on to the mystery of the disappearance of N-209. That set in motion my involvement beginning in the 1980s with several visits and searches in the area of Spy and Thesis Islands, part of the Jones Group.

In 2011, I had the opportunity to meet specialists at the Geophysical Institute at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. In different years and with different teams, together we organized four short expeditions to the site where the airplane was thought to have crashed.

Using magnetometers and sonar from both sea and ice, 5 square kilometers of the 36 square kilometers in question were scanned. Continuing the search under the International Heritage Aviation Search (IHAS) group and with improved technologies will require additional resources, modern geophysical equipment and a crack team of young geophysicists and volunteers. They will be looking for the airplane's four large 690 kilogram 12-cylinder EM34 FRN turbocharged engines and other metal parts that probably remain intact, even after the passage of 75+ years.

Today, when the United States and Russia are actively working to develop the Arctic Shelf, the joint search for the aircraft flown by Sigizmund Levanevsky — a pioneer of the Arctic air route and Hero of the Soviet Union— could become a symbol of scientific collaboration between the two countries. Only through cooperative efforts, like that of the 1937-1938 search that involved

Americans, Canadians and Russians, will it be possible to establish once and for all whether Levanevsky and his crew went down over Alaskan waters.

Postscript

Levanevsky was one of those larger than life aviation pioneers who in the 1920s and 1930s challenged the laws of physics in aircraft that were evolving rapidly from the fabric, wire and wood flying machines of WWI to the all-metal monocoque airframes and multi-engine aircraft that took to the skies during WWII. He and his experienced crew were part of the unique, daring corps of men and women who were known as **Stalin's Falcons**.



Figure 15 - Yuri Salnikov

The N-209 and its crew disappeared just 6 weeks after Amelia Earhart vanished in her Electra, on a similar 'adventure' trying to enter the aviation record book.

IHAS, the International Heritage Aviation Search group is a registered not-for-profit organization dedicated to finding missing aircraft of historical significance. The details relating to the current search for N-209 may be found at www.historicaircraftsearch.com Information on making a donation to this search may be found there.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Yuri Salnikov is a Russian journalist and filmmaker who has authored and produced over 100 documentary movies featuring aviation, cosmonauts and arctic exploration. Mr. Salnikov has been heavily involved in the investigation of the lost N-209 aircraft. Mr. Salnikov has produced a short film about N-209 and the Levanevsky search in Alaska which may be viewed by clicking on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hb-nNzLcjZ0&feature=youtu.be> He is an international fellow of the Smithsonian Institute, Air & Space Museum.



Figure 17 - Bil Thuma

Larisa Mikhaylova is an editor, literary critic and translator. She teaches at Lomonosov Moscow State University and has assisted Mr. Salnikov in archival research and coordinating the N-209 search project.

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Figure 16 - Larisa Mikhaylova

Inventive Life of Warren Smith – Part 2

By Warren Smith as told to Danielle Metcalf Chenail

EDITOR'S NOTE: During the Second World War thousands of Edmontonians enlisted in the Canadian military, many of them opting for the Royal Canadian Air Force. While not seeking fame or glory, these individuals put their lives in danger and many made the ultimate sacrifice. Others toiled in relative obscurity, proud just to serve their country. All of them deserve to have their stories told so we will never forget their contributions to our freedom. In Part 2 of the Inventive Life of Warren Smith, we look at Warren's service in Burma and his journey back to Edmonton after the war's end.

Arriving in Britain

I got to England in June 1944. I left home, here in Edmonton, on the train, and I think the next day was D-Day. We spent about a week on the train before we stopped off at Montreal and Lachine again. Then we took the train to the coast and loaded onto our ship for about two days. By then it was three or four days after D-Day. That was a big thing for the Allies – we had gotten a foothold.

Linton-on-Ouse was the station I was based out of in England. It is near York and had been a permanent base for the RAF before the war but was given to the Canadians about halfway through the war, so we could form our own group.

England to Burma

The squadrons - 435 and 436 transport squadrons - were assembled in Canada, but then they found when they got to England that a few of them didn't quite fit the bill – the boys needed some experience. All we had were young kids: 18, 19 years old. I was 20 when I joined 435 squadron in England but I was married, so I was always looked on as the father type and they'd come to me for advice.

I was no genius in geography in school but I sure wished I had been when I started travelling like I did during the war, because they never did tell us where we were going. I thought I was going to be stationed in France because they were moving a lot of people like myself, mechanics or ground crew - radio or otherwise, onto air fields as they captured them from the Germans. And then they started giving me shots that were supposedly protection against tropical diseases. I had 8 of them in one afternoon and every one of us was sick from all those shots.

On our way over to Burma we had about 25 people in the plane including the crew. We had seats along the wall and you sat facing over the aisle, but with our long kit bags piled right in front of us so high, you couldn't see the guy across the plane from you. I remember we landed in a place called Benito in North Africa. Unfortunately we started getting hot weather sickness almost as soon as we hit North Africa, and every time we landed somebody was sick. That's also where we got our first taste of Montezuma's revenge. The result wasn't always throwing up, and you try crawling over these kit bags in the middle of the airplane wanting to get to the one and only

toilet. It took a lot of skill to perform that in time, I'll say. I know I was wishing for a closer bathroom several times and a lot of us never made it in time.

We stopped overnight near Cairo, Egypt the second night. After Cairo, the pilot flew over Jerusalem with Baghdad the next stop. That was our first taste of real heat. We landed in Karachi in October 1944 and were to acclimatize there for about two weeks. On one of our first outings I bought a diary, even though we weren't supposed to keep one. But they never found it.

Based in Burma

The first instructions I remember getting, after we landed in the forward lines on Christmas Eve 1944 and we had no place to stay, was to just lay down on the ground for the night. We started operations the next morning. We were flying the DC-3s loaded down with goods, food, clothing, armament, guns, rifles, everything ammunition. Most of it was dropped by air from the plane.



Figure 18 - Warren (on far left) with Fellow Servicemen in Burma
(Warren Smith Collection)

We were right on the border of India and Burma - within almost three minutes we would be on the other side of the border. In fact we actually marched into Burma from our base one day and didn't even know we'd crossed the line from India to Burma. We were very close to the Irrawaddy River, which would take you out into the Indian Ocean.

We didn't have windows in our barracks - no panes of glass or anything. We had openings with covers that were on a hinge or on a

rope that was on a pulley up above. During monsoons, when it rained too hard, we let them down in a hurry, and we'd kind of fasten them at the bottom so they wouldn't blow open.

My buddy and I made our own shower. We got ahold of one of the disposable long-range gas tanks, strung it up in the bush, put it on a pulley, and we'd pulley it down, fill it with water, and after we were through showering in the morning, put it up there for next time. During the day a lot of times you would come home soaking wet from sweating, and we'd do that.

We had uniforms from the First World War that the British army had worn. We were given a pith helmet. It came way out, much like a fireman's at the back. That's to shield the back of your neck because you were working in the field. They discontinued those after the First World War. But they dug them out for us.

Dress code wasn't in effect. We just dressed in shorts all the time and a lot of the times no shirt either. We were forced, however, to put long pants on at sundown, and a shirt with long sleeves. That was for the mosquitoes.

Kickers

In Burma our squadron flew DC-3s, or Dakotas, twin-engine planes. We were a transport squadron so we were not active. In other words we had no armament whatsoever. Well, the pilots or aircrew wore sidearms - just revolvers – in case of capture, but most of them would take the guns off because they were bothering them too much while they were flying.

The Dakotas were terrific planes. I can't think of any time except when an engine overhaul had to be done, when they had any minor trouble and had to be grounded. Even the radio equipment was accurate with very little trouble.

The air crew usually had to make four to six circuits before we could get everything unloaded, by pushing it out by parachute or even dead drop. We would start getting packages as close to the door as possible because the pilot wouldn't want to go back over that run more than two times. And nine times out of ten at the end of your drop you were over enemy territory. They'd take pot shots at you, usually with rifles. The top speed of those airplanes was only about 250 miles an hour or so, too fast for a bullet to catch you, although we often came back with bullet holes in the floor of the plane.



*Figure 19 - Dakotas Operating Over Burma WW2
(RCAF Collection)*

This was how I got into the air. Ground crew could go flying as kickers because we were kicking the goods out. This was available to all ground crew if we wanted it. They paid us good for it and we had a great time. On our days off every 10 or 14 days we had nothing to do sitting in the jungle, and they paid us 50 cents a trip. Mind you, you could make four trips in a day so that was \$2 that you were getting.

Every time the air crew came back they had to go through the routine of letting their superior officer know what they saw or didn't see. Even as kickers, they would ask us if we saw anything because our airplanes didn't have any doors on them. It was too much hassle getting the door off so we just left it off. We used to stand at the door to watch below us. It was jungle most of the time but every once in a while we'd go over a village and see people waving at us.

Finding Music and Direction

So the Daks had to have direction-finding equipment and what they had were these trailing antennae. This was a radio and underneath the belly of the plane you would see what almost looks like a huge bullet, tapered off at the end, but in there was a loop of wire that would turn continually when they turned it on. Now the trailing antenna, was a piece of steel wire, about 1/8

of an inch thick with a weight on the end of it and it had to be wound up every time. The crew let it out once they got flying, and it would trail along behind. It was part of the radio equipment – almost like a compass. The flight crew would tune into a radio station, say New Delhi or Calcutta or a place like that. They could be Air Force stations or army stations, as long as they weren't mobile. They got to know the stations they could tune in to, but a lot of the times the signals from army equipment on the ground wasn't good enough to hear.

Where the accuracy fell down was when the monsoons came along. They were violent storms, and a lot of times that could give you a false reading, and you had to be on your toes to know that. You had an indicator that you were getting a radio signal a certain direction, and the loop in the bullet below the belly of the plane would circle around and around until it would settle on this station, or another station that you knew. They could be hundreds of miles apart.

Women of War

I remember a group of nurses landed at our base one night. There was, I think, about eight nurses visiting. I didn't know anything about why they were there, and it didn't matter to us, really. They made a tour of the camp and I remember I was in my cot. We called it a bed, but it was really a rope bed. These nurses went walking by and one of our guys happened to look out one of the windows and he says, "Women!" The answer that came back was: "Yes, we're women. We're nurses, and we're English." Well, if we hadn't been in bed and sleeping or close to it – I think we'd all have raced out there, forgetting we slept with no clothes on! I was sound asleep and thought I was dreaming as we never heard any women speaking English on our base.

No Messing Around



Figure 20 - Warren Smith in Burma, circa 1944-45
(Warren Smith Collection)

We were supplied with food, but it wasn't good. Even so, you did not complain about your food in the Air Force. Even here in Canada the officer of the day would come around and ask how the food was that day. You would never hear anyone say not good - it was always good. And it *was* here in Canada, in comparison to what we got in Burma. I'd say ninety times out of a hundred our main meal consisted of raw-looking beef in a flour and rice package. We were always yelling at the cooks, the poor guys, about this stuff. They couldn't help it, but we had to blame somebody.

I think once they got sick of our grumbling and took matters into their own hands. There were two mules that the peasants used in their rice fields to haul big bundles. It was a particularly bad time for food, and all of a sudden those two mules disappeared. And we swear that our cook went out and got us our meal of steaks. They were better than what we'd been getting,

and we enjoyed it, I'll tell you. We never thought of it at the time. I think the next day somebody finally clued in and asked, "Where did those mules go anyway last night?"

And somebody else yelled, "Oh, that's what we had for supper last night!" We could make fun of it at the time, but it almost sickens you to think back. But you knew you had to eat, that's all.

Our messing officer in Burma – every day he'd do his duty and ask, "How's the food today, fellas? Oh, good." And away he'd go before you could even answer! He was one of the most unpopular guys you've ever seen. You never heard so many boos in your life as what he got.

Eventually, he said enough was enough, and he came in this day and says, "I've figured out something for you guys." He says, "I think we can make your better food – if you're willing to pay." Now I can't remember the sum. But I'm going to say four rupees, which would have been about a dollar. I'm not sure if it was every week or every payday – we got paid twice a month, I think. Anyway, he had this worked out. He says, "I've been in Calcutta. I have to fly in there once a week." And he says, "I've visited a lot of the markets there." So he says "If all of you will chip in," (I'd say we're looking at close to seven hundred fellas) and we did. I'm not gonna say we lived like kings, but we got stuff that we had never had before.

I've often said I think that 435 Squadron was the only fighting force who had to buy its own meals. The officers were always fed better, but they still took part in this whole deal the Mess Officer came up with. But every once in a while we'd get a shipment in from Australia, which included orange juice - great big vats of it. And we'd get other goodies which weren't considered goodies but they were to us. They'd come in, and boy oh boy, were they ever good.

The drinking water we got was so heavily chlorinated I wouldn't drink a cup of tea for years after I got home. The water had to be treated so strongly. It was all in a carved barrel that had to be refilled every day. We had to use that even for brushing our teeth. The things we had to put up with – it's been acknowledged through official circles a little, but not too much.

Going Home

Our government didn't anticipate the ending of the war that fast. Our superiors didn't know anything about these atomic bombs any more than we did – it was all terribly secret. I'd never heard of one.

Finally, we were all flying in the Dakotas back to Britain, the airplanes that could still make it. Instead of 25 people packed in the back like when we went over in '44 there were about 14 of us with the crew. We sat on long rows of benches along the sides and our kit bags were in the center. That's where we sat, facing this pile of kit bags. When you got in in the morning we could go 6-8 hours before we stopped to refuel, and everybody got airsick.

On our way back we flew from Burma to Karachi - right from the eastern border of India at Burma to Karachi almost at the western border. We flew over absolutely desecrated country for nearly two days to get there. The plan was to only stay one night in Karachi, but the next day it was so foggy that we couldn't get off the ground and had to stay an extra night.

From there we took a more southern route along the coastline, then we landed in the central part of Africa to refuel. It was lunch time, which was a good thing because it was tremendously hot. We flew over the Red Sea, I can remember, and landed at a port called Aden on the way back. We landed at the far end of the runway from the buildings, and we had to taxi all that way; we had doors back on our aircraft by then and it was extremely hot. We used to joke that we couldn't find the air conditioning handle in the airplane. A couple of guys threatened to open the door and throw it away, but we thought we better not.

The next stop to refuel was up in the north – the Gaza strip. We stayed in Tel Aviv overnight because we could only fly about 6 hours at a time. The next morning we came out to our plane and our skipper wasn't there; the RAF sergeant in charge of the Tel Aviv base had grounded our plane. He grounded the plane because – like most of our Daks – it didn't have the engine apparatus that allowed you to go over 10,000 feet. Usually the highest we'd be flying was about 6,000 feet, but it turned out we were going directly by Mount Vesuvius, which was erupting.

Anyway, this sergeant had us shut down and we weren't going anywhere until we had one of those parts installed. And of course they didn't have one there, they'd have to bring one in. Our skipper came along, and he wanted to get home as bad as the rest of us. He and the sergeant had a few words and the last I heard was our skipper, he didn't have a gravelly voice but I can still hear him saying, "Sergeant, you're not standing at attention. I want a salute from you - you never gave me one, and I want one right now! Now you just stand there." He waved us all into the plane and I don't know if that sergeant is still standing there now.

Somewhere over the Mediterranean Sea both engines stopped. There were eight of us ground crew - they'd taken the seats out of the aircraft and so we were just laying on the floor. It was a hot day, the pilots had fallen asleep and they forgot to switch the tank when one ran dry. So there was kind of a mad scramble and somebody says, "Where's the parachutes?" I said, "The same place they always are!" During our tenure in Burma we didn't have them. There was probably no more than a 30-second pause, but when both motors stopped, that sure woke us up. I've never heard of any of the pilots admitting to it though.

Finally I was back in England waiting for the boat home. We were kept in Bournemouth and they held a parade every morning. We didn't stray far because if they unexpectedly got a couple of extra ships that weren't full, they'd call a parade and go down the list there. Nobody knew where you were on the list, so you wanted to be sure you were there for parade!

EDITOR'S NOTE: Upon returning to Edmonton and reuniting with his wife Joyce, Warren Smith began repairing radios, then tape recorders. One day, he was called out to the Edmonton Gardens to fix the public address system and ended up becoming an announcer for the hockey games played there. He spent thirty years announcing hockey and went on to host all manner of events. Warren also took to selling insurance, then acting as a travelling salesman for a paper wholesaler. In his later years Warren returned to England on vacation and actively participated in reunions for Burma veterans.



Figure 21 - Warren Smith
(Warren Smith Collection)

Who shares the hangar? EAHS Member Organizations

Air Cadet Museum & Archives
 Civil Air Search & Rescue Association
 Edmonton Homebuilt Aircraft Association
 504 Blatchford Field Royal Canadian Air Cadets
 180-20th Field Regiment Royal Canadian Army Cadets
 700 (Edmonton) Wing Air Force Association of Canada

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 418 RCAF Squadron Association
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“In Formation” is a publication of the Alberta Aviation Museum

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