
NEWS RELEASE

Abbotsford Airport Celebrates the First Landing

Abbotsford, November 16, 2007 – November 21 marks a milestone in British Columbia's aviation history and the history of Abbotsford International Airport.

Sixty-five years ago, a twin engine Cessna Crane landed on a newly laid and not yet completed runway at a secret location within the British Columbia mainland -- Abbotsford.

"The camouflaged Royal Canadian Air Force plane was only one of hundreds of military planes operating on the West Coast in 1942," says local air force historian, Michael DesMazes. "Many of these aircraft were here for the purpose of protecting Canada's west coast from what was perceived to be an imminent invasion. World War II was by this time over two years old, war on the Pacific was a new threat for both Canada and the USA."

According to DesMazes, there were hundreds of aircraft on the west coast and thousands across Canada that were part of the national program to train air crew for the Second World War. The scheme was better known as the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, (BCATP), and it involved dozens of stations across Canada training all aspects of military aviation. Pilots, navigators, bomb aimers, radiomen, air gunners trained to both fly and maintain one of the largest air forces of World War II.

In 1942, the Abbotsford Airport was a barren landscape. There were no buildings, no hangars and no staff. There was no Airport staff, civilian or military, on hand to greet the first flight. The people that greeted the pilot and passengers were workmen, some local labourers, from the King Paving Company of Oakville Ontario, all of whom were under contract to the Government of Canada. Their job was to pave the runways and the surrounding access roads so that further construction could get underway.

"It is important to remember our history and where Abbotsford International began" says Dave Kandal, Chair of the Abbotsford Airport Authority. "That first landing was the start of something big for our community. From training future fighter pilots to servicing the travel of more than half a million passengers a year our little airstrip has grown up to become a regional player in the provincial transportation network."

Within weeks of that first landing on November 21 1942, the runway would be officially designated as the Royal Canadian Air Force Station: Abbotsford. In matter of months the first of hundreds of student pilots and other air crew began training at Abbotsford. During the final year of the war, Abbotsford Station would boast a combined staff and student population greater than the surrounding communities.

The airport will be hosting a Royal Canadian Air Force display in the coming weeks to celebrate this historic landing.

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Abbotsford International Airport is the Fraser Valley's regional airport and serves over 500,000 passengers annually from Surrey to Hope. Conveniently located off the trans-Canada highway, Abbotsford International offers daily service to Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver Island as well as a seasonal weekly charter service to Mexico. With close, affordable parking, on-site wi-fi service, and self-serve check in kiosks, Abbotsford is the preferred choice for travelers wanting a friendly, easy and stress-free travel experience.

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