



Co-pilot Jack Kean and C-FGAD at Whitehorse Airport.

For some types of flying, the amphibian is very hard to beat . . .

The Far North — By Seabee

By ANDREW H. CHAPESKIE, BA., MD.

One summer about ten years ago, the town of Inuvik, NWT on the Beaufort Sea had a fly-in to mark an anniversary. I seriously considered going but at that time Seabee FGAD still sported the old Franklin engine which I was beginning to fly with tongue in cheek. Now I don't think that was necessary because when I changed engines I had almost 500 hours on the old 1947 Franklin without any major problems. It had carried me and my two sons on several fishing trips to James Bay without even a cough. When I think about it now I'm sure the engine was as rugged and well built as the airplane. All it needed was a few more horses.

In 1978 the Seabee became Super Bee with the installation of a Lycoming power plant of 270 horses. Not only did the take-off and climb performance improve but my fuel consumption came down about 30%. Cruise averages out to about 110 which is only about 10 miles per hour

faster than the old engine — I am sure because of parasite drag.

July 12, 1983 was hot and claggy as I climbed out of Barry's Bay International on a VFR flight plan to Timmins. It was the start of my vacation and long-dreamed-of trip to this part of the North Country. Although the Super Bee has taken me to as far North as "POV" on the Quebec side of Hudson Bay, and last summer to the top of Newfoundland, this trip to the Arctic Ocean was by far my biggest venture. As I pulled onto the ramp at Timmins, fellow-pilot and friend Jack Kean walked out to meet me and we tied the Seabee down for the night. Jack flies a 180 Lycoming-powered 172 on floats.

That evening was consumed by marking mileage and lines on maps and a short visit with Ray McLean, Austin Airways pilot who is intimately familiar with the Far North. Although we were fully equipped with food, tent, sleeping bags, foams, etc.

to spend at least a week in the bush if we had to, we felt anything further Ray could offer would be of value.

The next morning some rain passed through but we were airborne by 10:00 enroute to Geraldton and fighting a strong headwind. Because of this we elected to stop for fuel at Sioux Lookout and proceed from there to Red Lake. The late afternoon sun was hot and the northwest wind was now blowing at about 35 mph when we decided to land on Sasaginigak Lake near the Manitoba border.

After a peaceful night under canvas we awoke to the wind still howling out of the northwest. Waves on the lake were about 18 inches or better but that is not a problem for the Seabee. Our first stop that morning was The Pas, Manitoba followed by LaRonge and finally Uranium City, Saskatchewan in the later afternoon. Almost a ghost town. Population down to 350 from 3500. We were given a drive around town

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by the local Mountie and it was sad to see so many of the beautiful buildings and homes closed down and boarded up. The airport was virtually deserted so we decided to camp right on the parched lawn beside the airport terminal.

July 14 dawned overcast with our ever-present wind still out of the northwest. However, Yellowknife on the north side of Great Slave Lake was not too far away. This is a rugged area. Without doubt it has some of the nicest-looking trout water I have ever seen. Considered stopping to fish but we would have more time later. Yellowknife is a busy town with a lot of friendly people. The rest of the day was spent sightseeing, followed by dinner at the Wildcat Cafe — the caribou steak was excellent.

Weather the next day was good again and about noon we were underway for Fort Simpson on the MacKenzie River. Our next stop was Norman Wells for fuel, followed by a short jump over the mountains to spend the night at a trapper's cabin on Kelly Lake and an evening fish for grayling.

July 16 was Long John weather and continued so until we got to Dawson City. Would you believe almost no flies? Never got to use my new mosquito jacket. The north heading to Colville Lake and Lodge north of the Arctic Circle was at least 90 degrees to the still-blowing west wind. This ruined our lake trout fishing that afternoon but we enjoyed our tour around this beautiful hand-hewn log resort. The owner, Bernard Brown, paints some beau-

tiful northern scenery which appears to be a bigger breadwinner than the tourist business.

Next morning the weather had improved some and by the time we landed at Inuvik the sun was shining. Here we captured a picture of our lowly Seabee beside Prime Minister Trudeau's Challenger Jet. He was there to close the Arctic Summer Games which we watched most of the following afternoon. The morning was spent flying over to Tuktoyaktuk (TUK) and a look at the Esso and Dome oil exploration installations. Out in the Bay a new oil rig was being assembled. Back in Inuvik we met Ram Air Charter's Lyle Trimble who graciously offered us the use of his cabin and canoe on a lake about 50 miles south. So, after tiring of waiting for Mr. Trudeau to arrive at the Arctic Summer Games, we climbed aboard the Bee and headed for the lake and a bit of evening fishing.

July 19 weather was forecast at 4500 broken with occasional showers at Dawson City. Inuvik was the same. However, as we climbed above the Richardson Mountains along the Dempster Highway toward Dawson City, the 3500 ft. ground elevation made it seem much worse. After going through the first high pass we began losing altitude slowly on the west side of the ridge because of a mountain wave

downdraft due to the strong southeast wind. It took about 85% power to maintain altitude and it was rather unpleasant as we did not have an abundance of height to start with.

We shortly flew into some rain and decided to land on the emergency strip at Eagle Plains, Yukon Territory to recheck the weather and possibly stay the night. This strip is part of the road, and surface conditions were uncertain, but I reasoned that if the PM landed there with his Twin Otter to spend the night two days earlier, the surface had to be satisfactory. I was rather surprised to find the runway made up of completely pit-run gravel with some of the stones baseball-size with very sharp edges. No wonder our road-bound friends carry so many spare tires. I am sure one of the reasons we avoided difficulty was that I inflated the tires on the Bee with at least 25 pounds of pressure more than called for by the book.

The weather at Dawson was still as originally described so we decided it was flyable and arrived back at the airstrip to find a 15 to 20 mile-an-hour steady crosswind. Somewhat different to flying in Ontario where you more often than not have the protection of some trees. Simply put, I would not take off there under those conditions again — no room for error.

One hundred miles further south produced heavy rain showers and decreased visibility and this time we elected to land on Chapman Lake instead of the nearby emergency strip. The showers shortly abated but patches of fog persisted and we

The writer, Dr. Andy Chapeski, with his "Super Seabee" at Tuk Airport on the Beaufort Sea.



decided to stay the night. Luckily there was no wind that night and our tent remained upright. There was almost nothing to tie it to. Pegs don't work good in peat moss.

The next morning at 7:45 we were awakened by what sounded like the roar of another Seabee, only to find it was a Hughes 500 helicopter landing right beside us. Comforting to know that the S and R people are right on their toes. Although our flight notification arrival at Dawson City was 20:00 the previous night, Search and Rescue was not alerted until 09:00 the following morning. Just checking I'm sure.

The helicopter pilot reported the weather from Chapman Lake to Dawson City as good but I am sure he meant only if you were flying the helicopter. However, it really was not that bad; some ceilings down to 2-300 ft. above the highway, a few small showers and we were into the Yukon River Canyon.

Dawson Airport, although muddy because of recent rains, has a very firm surface and (we were told) never any winds. I think this was the first time in my life I never tied my bird down.

Dawson City certainly needs two days of sightseeing time. Besides the artifacts of the Gold Rush, the Gaslight Follies, Diamond Lil's — the only legal gambling casino in Canada — and Robert Service's cabin (with the poetry recital of the Cremation of Sam McGee) are a must.

July 21 was a beautiful day with our first tailwind. Airborne at 15:15 and climbed to 6000 ft. over some spectacular scenery. Two hours later put us into Whitehorse where we had plenty of time for dinner and sightseeing till midnight as we were still in the land of the midnight sun. Beautiful weather again the next day and we had a terrible decision to make. Should we accept an invitation from John Peacock, DC3 captain and owner of the only Seabee in the Yukon Territory, to go fishing for a day or two — or should we head for home? The complicating factor was that my son was getting married in seven days and we would need at least three days flying time to get across the continent without counting bad weather.

So, with some regret we filed our flight plan for Watson Lake and at 15:15 hours we were eastbound at 7.5, again through some spectacular scenery. We landed in exactly two hours and a further 2:10 hours took us to Fort Nelson, BC. Weather remained good and the next day we were on to High Level, Alberta with a run at Fort McMurray that night. No time for sightseeing now so the next morning saw our first gas stop at Prince Albert, Sask., the next one at Dauphin, Man., and at 18:15 we were clearing to land at Minaki and tied up at the beach of Tory Ontario's playhouse Minaki Lodge. Total flying time: 9 hours and 5 minutes.

After gassing up at Kenora in the morn-



A dramatic shot of an Arctic oil rig under construction. Jack Kean prepares to wet a line in a lake 50 miles south of Inuvik.



ing our next stop was Geraldton. We dodged a few thunderstorms and spent the night with John Kapel, a friend of Jack's who runs Executive Lodge on Brunswick Lake about 100 miles west of Timmins. Excellent walleye fishing, and bird-watched a pair of bald eagles with their baby that John saved after a windstorm ruined their tree house.

The next day was July 27 and at 1100 hours I dropped Jack off at Timmins and 2:45 hours later touched down at Barry's Bay.

Total flying time: 70.5 hours; landed at 33 different airports and lakes; and covered about 7500 miles in 2 1/2 weeks. Only problem enroute was a crack in the right exhaust collector which is pretty normal wear and tear on this machine.

My thoughts on the trip? Biggest prob-

lem is the apprehension of never having been there. Lots of VOR with good radio facilities now although the poor ADF range has still not changed. The amphibian cannot be beaten for this type of flying, and when in the mountains, pray for VFR weather or better. Sure helps to be able to share the flying and some extra cushions would help on good-weather days.

Next year, the good Lord willing, we will revisit Yellowknife, go north to Bathurst Inlet on Coronation Gulf and make a round-robin over to Baker Lake and home by way of Hudson and James Bay. This is to be an old-fashioned eastern-style trout fishing trip — the Arctic char fishing starts somewhere around Coronation Gulf and I am sure with this the speckled trout. Oddly enough, these are rare in the western Arctic. ♦