

well. While the selection of the more than 200 photographs cannot be faulted, the decision to print the photographic pages on the same paper stock as the rest of the book, particularly in light of the expensive map production, is a particularly puzzling bit of false economy. The layout is characterized by vast white spaces for no apparent reason, esthetic or practical, while such errors as captions under the wrong photographs and the printing of the incorrect half of a cropped photograph indicate a slovenliness in editing at the production level that is unacceptable in a book of this stature. Such elementary clangers in aircraft recognition as calling a DH4 a DH9 or calling a Martinsyde and SE5A Bristol Fighters does little to generate respect for the compilers.

Wise, in paying tribute to the members of the Directorate of History past and present who worked on the book describes them as too numerous to list. It is indeed a pity that the effort was not made as he and they have produced a book which is a solid foundation for future historical work, official and unofficial, on the hitherto largely untouched topic of Canadian military aviation history.

Carl Vincent
Federal Archives Division
Public Archives of Canada

The Magnificent Distances: Early Aviation in British Columbia 1910-1940. Interviews and initial research by PAUL STODDART. Commentary by DAVID PARKER. Compiled and edited by DENNIS DUFFY and CAROL CRANE. Victoria: Queen's Printer for British Columbia, 1980. ii, 78 p. illus. \$3.00 pa.

It is commonplace to remark upon the great developments in aviation within the lifetime of individuals who are still living. However, many of these people are aging and dying, often without telling their stories. The initiative represented by the Public Archives of British Columbia's publication *The Magnificent Distances* is therefore commendable.

A part of that institution's Sound Heritage Series, the book consists of excerpts from interviews with twelve of the province's aviation pioneers, men and women ranging in age from 64 to 87. They represent a wealth of experience in military, commercial and private aviation: Gordon Ballentine, Joe Bertalino, Cyril Charters, Ted Cressy, Harold Davenport, Earl Gerow, Walter Gilbert, Maurice McGregor, Donald McLaren, Earl MacLeod, Margaret Fane Rutledge and Hal Wilson. Editors Dennis Duffy and Carol Crane have arranged selections from Paul Stoddart's interviews in chapters entitled " 'Through Space Suspended' ", " 'Flying on the Coast' ", " 'The First Airfields' ", " 'A Dollar Here and a Dollar There' ", " 'Into the Bush' " and " 'A Definite Change in the Times' ". Informative without becoming obtrusive, David Parker's commentary supplies essential context as well as illumination of such specialized terms as "the Gosport system" mentioned in the interviews.

Students of aviation history will recognize the themes which emerge from the interviews; however, the stories lose none of their fascination because of their predictable nature. Ted Cressy's description of Victoria's first airfield evokes the primitive conditions: "You could always take off from the north end of the (Landsdowne) field more or less, and you'd be just about in the air when you passed (Bowker) creek. But if you had a strong wind coming in, you had to come down very close to the creek and just skip over it and then make your landing". Hal Wilson recalls the Eve brothers in a way that shows how an interviewee who does not mince words can go right to the heart of a subject: "They did stupid things like carrying people loaded to the gunwales in an airplane that was never designed for it, and flying 50 feet off the water with a pair of

wheels to land on — absolutely stupid. But they learned by experience. In other words, they were crashed out of business”. Donald McLaren recalls the humble origins of the Aero Club of British Columbia: “They had a little room on the corner of Bute Street or Jervis or Beach Avenue in somebody’s house. There wasn’t a thing in there except a table — a place to play poker, you see. And you’d bring a bottle of Scotch along with you. . . . What did we meet for? Nobody had any idea, except that they wanted to form a club and get some airplanes to fly”. Gordon Ballentine describes the hand-to-mouth nature of barnstorming during the Depression: “We used to barnstorm up and down the Fraser Valley with our little two-seater airplanes. . . . You’d fly up to some farmer’s field, take him and his family for a ride, and he’d let you use the field and you’d carry whoever came along for whatever you could get.” Finally, Harold Davenport expresses the feeling of nostalgia for the “good old days” before the advent of modern giants like Air Canada and CP Air: “Flying, then and today, are totally different things. There is very little in common except that you are off the ground. As a matter of fact, I don’t think anyone has really enjoyed the full thrill of flying until they have flown in an open-cockpit plane.”

The Magnificent Distances blends various types of archival documents — taped interviews, maps, photographs, and the evocative watercolour which appears on the book’s cover — in an attractive yet inexpensive package which should appeal to a general audience as well as to aviation buffs. For those who like their oral history undiluted, PABC also makes available the complete interviews in the form of a cassette sound program entitled *From Jericho Beach to Swanson Bay*.

Peter Robertson
National Photography Collection
Public Archives of Canada.



Victoria Faulkner Collection

Yukon Archives and Records Services

Located at: 2nd Ave. and Hawkins St. Box 2703,
Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6
Phone: 403-667-5321; Telex: 036-8-260

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