

# Burning fuel oil lit path for night landings

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multi-millionaire Alec Forbes. Forbes owned retreats at Tyson and Burwash Lakes in the Sudbury area. Cameron worked for him in the summer and was paid a retainer the rest of the year. After two seasons he received a phone call from Jim Bell of Austin Airways and an acquaintance of his.

"I had just put the aircraft away in storage when Jim Bell phoned...and asked if I would assist with this problem they had in Moosonee." Bell estimated it would take about two weeks for the problem to be solved.

"They didn't get it straightened around and two weeks eventually got into 20 years at Austin," says Cameron. Why?

"It was my type of life. I liked hunting and fishing." In fact, he had been to the Moosonee area before on goose hunting trips. Now the journey wasn't as far.

Austin handled the passengers, freight and mail for the northern outposts on both sides of James and Hudson bays to Cape Dorset on Baffin Island. Many areas were inhabited only by Inuit and Cree Indians. Sometimes Cameron flew in well-known people, such as Dr. Walter Kenyon of the Royal Ontario Museum who was working on an archaeological dig on an island in James Bay.

"There weren't any roads. There weren't any air strips either, at that time. We went through periods of true break

up and ice up," he says of the lakes and rivers there. Waterways were often the only way into these communities. The aircraft were equipped with floats in the summer and skis in the winter.

Cameron recalls one muskeg on Belcher Island posed a danger. Despite bitterly cold temperatures, chemical reactions kept the water warmer than others with as little as two inches of ice on the surface. Trying to land a DC-3 on this would be disastrous but Cameron had been warned ahead of time. Uninformed pilots could have perished in the 'warm' water had they attempted a landing there.

Slush on frozen lakes also posed a problem. If aircraft landed on it the slush would freeze to the skis and make it a permanent part of the landscape; grounded by the weight of the ice. To get around this dilemma "parking ramps" built of logs were put on the ice so when the pilot landed he could taxi onto it, unload his cargo and take off again without coming to a stop in the slush.

Then there was the cold itself.

"I was in Povungnituk, Que. one night when it was 70 below Fahrenheit. That was cold," says Cameron.

Such conditions posed mechanical problems. For example when a pilot flew into a place and stayed overnight the oil had to be drained from the aircraft's engine and heated the next day before being put back into the plane.

One of Cameron's closest calls came when his engine quit shortly after takeoff. Ahead of the runway was an

area cleared of trees but with three foot stumps still remaining. Cameron immediately performed what is known as a side slip — the aircraft is turned so both wings are perpendicular to the ground and then quickly righted — which allows the craft to land in a short distance. Had he not done so, "I probably wouldn't be here today," he says. The aircraft and himself would have been torn to pieces on the jagged stumps of trees that ironically had been cut down to give more room for takeoffs. Cameron later found out the fuel gauge had stuck, telling him there was gas in the tank when it was empty.

At Povungnituk, green garbage bags were placed in the snow around the runway to identify the landing strip. At night empty apple juice cans were filled with toilet paper

and fuel oil, then laid around the runway and ignited.

Living in this climate required ingenuity. Aircraft require maintenance under any conditions but working on them in -50 F can lead to instant frostbite, so he built a hood to enclose the engine, hooked up a Herman Nelson heater and ran a duct into the enclosure. This enabled mechanics to work on the plane in their shirt sleeves.

Cameron developed a heart condition in his later years with Austin and "flew a desk" for a few more years before taking early retirement in 1979.

Asked why he stayed with such a demanding and dangerous job for so long, he says, "I enjoyed every minute of it up there with Austin. It was just my sort of life. It was the last frontier."



Dr. Bill Oyle and Bruce West, who Cameron flew in to remote areas for fishing trips.

Bill  
Remember when ....  
Monday Feb. 28 1994

Cameron, Scott

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