



After the war, Sam started a charter service with Bill Whitely and Doug Todd. They chartered for trappers and fishermen and had a flight training school. To improve payload, their Piper J-3 Cub functioned without a starter or radio. No tiger at 65 horsepower, it enabled them to establish a business. They had to take risks early on. Once, in their PA-12 they flew dynamite and caps together to Norman Wells for \$500, now prohibited by current regulations.

With the energy boom in British Columbia, Sam could not afford to ignore the oil companies. They paid well, but they wanted to fly regardless of the weather. As Sam puts it, "They wanted charters when it was forty below and wanted to go."²¹

Another local bush pilot, Don Lumsden, moved to Dawson Creek in 1972, also flying in the charter business. Nowadays, he flies a classic Avenger with a 1,950-horsepower Wright R2600 engine. For some time he used it for crop dusting, but now uses a more economical AgCat. Some years ago he flew DC-7s in Senegal, spraying locusts from near treetop level. On his way to Morocco, in company with another DC-7, Saharan dissidents fired heat-seeking missiles that hit both aircraft. The other DC-7, the one that Don had been flying regularly, went down with no survivors. The one that Don just happened to be flying that day dead-sticked to an airstrip. It was an ugly experience for him. The missile hit his No. 1 engine, severing the controls, and he had a runaway engine that eventually tore out of its mount.



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Sam Side (L), and Don Lumsden, with Don's Avenger, at Dawson Creek Airport, June 2000.



Bob Trail at Dawson Creek Airport, June 2000.

Yet another local pilot, Bob Trail, began his flying career in 1948. His instructor was Sam Side and, in the J-3 Cub, they often hovered like a helicopter in strong winds. He observed that in his early days “planes were like cars or pickup trucks because there were practically no roads off the Highway in British Columbia.”²²

While never heavily involved as a major player in the Northwest Staging Route (because the early rush of US military aircraft both to Alaska and Siberia bypassed it), Dawson Creek does not have an airport as big as that of its northern neighbour, Fort St. John. There has always been intense rivalry between the two for air traffic.

Dawson does boast an adjacent lagoon for floatplanes, as a convenience for those passengers and pilots who want to switch types quickly, but Fort St. John has a floatplane base at Charlie Lake on the other side of town, about 15 miles (24 km) from the airport, a base that has seen a great deal of aviation activity during the last 50 years.



A Cessna 185 awaiting ice breakup at Dawson Creek Airport, June 2000.