

## Don Thompson



**Born:** 1920  
Cheshire, England

**Died:** 11 April, 2015  
Comox B.C.

**Married:** wife Jeanne-Marie  
2 sons, 1 daughter  
3 grandchildren

R.A.F.

Pilot

Flying Instructor

**B.C. Airlines**

**ABAS** founder/owner

Donald Hugh Thompson was born and educated in England. He attended Shrewsbury School in Shropshire and after he left school he worked in the family business, Lion Saltworks, in Norwich. In WWII, he joined the RAF and started flying in 1942. He flew B-24 Liberators out of the Cocos Islands to drop supplies to the British and Allied troops trapped in Burma. In 1943, he was in Winnipeg for flying training and it was there he met his wife, Jeanne-Marie. After the war, he continued flying as a pilot for British European Airways. In 1948 the family decided to move to Chilliwack, his wife's home town in Canada. Don worked on various jobs while keeping up his flying and instructing at Chilliwack Flying Club.

In 1955, Don was offered a job with **B.C.Airlines** in Alert Bay and the family moved to Cormorant Island. Over a couple of years, the airline's Alert Bay operation was sold to several different firms and both passengers and personnel were becoming dissatisfied with the situation. A new company providing a competitive service was needed for the region. In 1958 Don Thompson, **Don Groth**, and Dave Morrison started **Alert Bay Air Services** with \$7,000. They bought 2 planes for \$3,000 each, a 65 HP J-3 Piper and an 85 HP Taylor craft, and rented a Seabee from famed 'flying doctor' Jack Pickup. Their first trip was for BC Tel. The firm grew drastically from these humble beginnings.

In their early days of operating there was a lot of competition particularly when **B,C, Airlines** brought in two new pilots and 2 new planes. However ABAS expanded regularly, increasing their routes. In 1960/61, they added Kelsey Bay and Port Hardy, in 1962 Bella Bella, in 1965 scheduled flights between Alert bay and Kelsey Bay and in 1967 they were licensed for runs between Ocean Falls, Bella Bella and Hardy Bay.

In 1971, ABAS bought out West Airlines Port Hardy operation and moved their base office from Alert Bay to Port Hardy. They had 15 aircraft after this buy-out but sold off 5 small Cessnas. Don had stopped flying in 1968, becoming mainly occupied with the management of the company. During the 70's there were constant problems with political decisions concerning small airlines, and contention with P.W.A. over the Campbell River

run.

ABAS was renamed as Gulf Air Aviation in 1978 and bought by Jim Pattison in 1980 as part of Air BC.

Don Thompson retired to Campbell River during the 1980's where he spent happy days gardening and writing letters to his friends and associates from over the years.

