

Kjell Kessell



Kjell Kessell, a Viking with flaming red hair, was born in Norway in 1936. He became involved in shooting and collecting guns when he was 10 years old. During the late sixties he was a weapons instructor and had specialized training in Commando tactics in the Norwegian National Guard. In 1968 he obtained his commercial pilot licence and in 1974 he retired from the National Guard as a Sergeant Major and moved to B.C. Initially, before moving to Port Hardy, he is said to have been working in Ocean Falls and to have called himself Kjell Brendelsen. In Port Hardy he was reputedly one of the most unique characters in a field of strong contenders

Kjell would fly in any weather and was the quintessential bush pilot. On one occasion he was flying low along the coast with visibility about 400 metres and came close to crashing with Jack Schofield, who was doing the same thing in the opposite direction. When Jack tried to discuss it later, Kjell, a man of few words, replied only 'we must have missed'. One of Kjell's passions was fishing and in the herring season he filled the bathtub with brine to pickle his surplus catch. He was a great fan of jazz and of Sara Vaughan, to him 'Sara 'Voggin'.

Flying a single Otter, Kjell was coming in to land on Port Hardy runway one time and at the last minute his passengers asked him to land on the water instead.

Kjell forgot to raise the landing wheels which resulted in a pretty rough landing for everyone but did no damage to the plane. Normally this would be an error that resulted in firing but since no-one was injured, the passengers all defended Kjell, and the plane was undamaged, base manager **Villi Douglas** forgave him. Later, unfortunately, he repeated the error—only this time, he landed on the runway on floats with the wheels up. The outcome for both plane and pilot was markedly different.

Kjell flew more than 12,000 hours on the B.C. coast flying seaplanes, winter glaciers and firebombing with a Catalina. In 2,000 he built the first original Colin Archer 40 ft wooden Norwegian Pilot Cutter in North America, which became his residence.

Aged 81, He went missing near Tom Mac Shipyards in Richmond on May 7 2018, and was reported missing to the RCMP on May 12th. The end of this chapter is unknown. Kjell's boat which he called 'Ruggen' is now at the Vancouver Maritime Museum, Heritage Harbour.

