

EARLY AVIATION

Bob McClelland, 555 Dover Rd., Richmond July 25/73 Alex Moir

The first flight which Mr. McClelland remembers ended with the pilot coming down just short of No. 2 Road, in what is known as Richmond Gardens.

The next remembered flight ended just West of No. 2 and the pilot suffered a broken leg.

When Billy Stark's school was at Minoru Park, he believes they never took off, but when they moved to the Milligan Farm between No. 1 Road and the dyke, they took off and circled. Their estimated air speed was 45 mph.

Around 1919-20, 4 or 5 Jennies came to Minoru Park, and flew out of there all summer. They practised the falling leaf glide and three of them crashed through not pulling out early enough. In the third crash, a passenger, the manager of the Union Steamship Company, lost his life. That put an end to the aerobatics.

The first official airfield was North Of Lansdowne. This airfield came into use around 1927-28. Mr. McClelland learned to fly there, in a Gypsy Moth. He learned under Percy Hainstock and was up with Mr. Hainstock in the flight prior to Mr. Hainstock's fatal flight. Mr. Hal Wilson then took over training and he was the first pupil to go up with Mr. Wilson, it being a rule that anyone being involved in or being close to a bad crash should go up again as quickly as possible. Mr. McClelland's color vision turned up to be abnormal and Ottawa refused to license him.

Hal Wilson taught "dead stick" landings. Wilson was a very good pilot. Caught in heavy rain without coats, he brought McClelland down very fast. Coming out of a side-slip, the nose has to go down in order to pick up speed, and Hal put the nose hard down, barely clearing the power lines.

Hal took a glider up from the Lansdowne field. The towing aircraft allowed the glider to go up too fast and it seemed likely that the pilot would not clear the telephone wires. He could not gain altitude as his tail was being lifted up by the glider, so he dove, skidded along the ground, and took off, climbing steeply and clearing the wires.

In 1935-6, the airport facilities were expanded, in anticipation of trouble from the Far East. Several HURRICANES came here.

When WW II broke out, he worked with Bill Bolton at the Elementary Flying Training School on Sea Island. He was an aircraft engineer. A qualified engineer checked one out on the first two or three rigging jobs and then left one alone. After any major work, the engineer involved had to go up on the test flight. Bill Bolton could take up an aircraft and say just which screws to tighten or loosen, and by how much.

The school had some 35 Tiger Moths with inverted engines, about 26 of them being in operation each day. The school achieved 25,000 student flying hours without a fatality.

Shortly after Pearl Harbour, the school moved and Mr. McClelland went to Boeings as a machinist.