

REGINALD CAMERON (REG) THURBER (1919-1968)

By Geoff Buck and Doug VanDine



Reginald Cameron Thurber was born in 1919 in Bear River, Nova Scotia. In 1921, his family moved to Edson, Alberta. After high school, Reg joined the Royal Canadian Air Force where he began as an aircraft mechanic and worked his way up to becoming a pilot. After the Second World War, Reg studied Civil Engineering at the University of Alberta.

Upon graduating in 1949, Reg was hired by the BC Department of Public Works to establish a materials testing service branch, later to become the Department of Highways Materials Testing Branch. The branch, based in Victoria, provided construction quality control and site investigation services, including drilling, throughout the province. In 1957, Reg left government to form a partnership with Dave Coffey that became R.C. Thurber and Associates. Under Reg's leadership, the company provided soil mechanics and foundation engineering services, primarily for highways and railways in BC and Alberta. The company is now known as Thurber Engineering Ltd. and has offices throughout Canada.

On January 8, 1968, Reg's Cessna 320 took off from Vancouver bound for Edmonton for a business trip. Reg and Harvey Dishaw, another R.C. Thurber and Associates employee, and Gary Foslien, a young commercial pilot, were on board. The plane completed a required radio check over Enderby, BC. but never made the next scheduled radio check at Rocky Mountain House, Alberta. A North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) radar station located in Montana tracked the plane in a slow descent east of Enderby until they lost contact somewhere in the Rogers Pass area of BC. The winter search for the missing plane was one of the largest in Canadian aviation history, up until that time. The search was resumed in the summer of 1968. Both were unsuccessful.

The plane was not found until on July 29, 2006 when a pair of hikers stumbled across the site of the plane crash in a remote area near Golden, BC. A nearby peak was subsequently named Thurber Mountain by the BC Government (N51 degrees 37 minutes 54 seconds, E117 degrees 05 minutes 32 seconds, Elev. 2510 m).

Reg left behind his wife, Peggy, and four brothers. One of Reg's brothers, Stewart Thurber (1918-2013), owned and operated Westcoast Foundation Drilling, a Victoria-based geotechnical drilling company associated with R.C. Thurber and Associates. Harvey Dishaw left behind his wife, Eileen, and two sons.



Taken during the 9th Canadian Soil Mechanics (Geotechnical) Conference held at the University of British Columbia in December 1955. Left to Right: Reg Thurber (age 36), Vic Dolmage (age 68), Bill Shannon (age 42) and Earl Klohn (age 28). Thurber, Shannon and Klohn presented papers in the same session during the conference.