

Okanagan Helicopters

Civilian Helicopter Services

Inducted: 2018

Established: 1949
Vancouver, BC.



Okanagan Helicopters' original helicopter, the first helicopter in BC, is on display in the BC Aviation Museum.

In 1965 one of its helicopters made the first unescorted flight across the Atlantic Ocean.

By 1981 it had 125 helicopters and some 900 employees.



In the summer of 1947 commercial helicopter flying was introduced to BC with three ex-RCAF officers, pilots Carl Agar and Barney Bent, and engineer Alf Stringer, operating a Bell 47-B3 from their Penticton, BC, fixed-wing charter company; Okanagan Air Services. Moving to Vancouver in 1949, the company was renamed Okanagan Helicopters and focused on rotary-wing aircraft. By 1954 it had grown to own over 45 helicopters with 58 pilots and 85 air engineers.

Initially used for agricultural spraying, the helicopter's unique ability to ascend vertically suggested a host of new applications. Pioneering new techniques and uses, Okanagan Helicopters also became a world leader in mountain flying, training helicopter pilots from around the world. By the mid-1950s the company played a key part in building the Mid-Canada Radar Line and in the 1960s began operating internationally. Converting to turbine helicopters in the 1970s, Okanagan Helicopters purchased 7 Canadian helicopter companies and grew significantly. Finally, in 1987 it was sold to Canadian Helicopters Corp., which continues as a world leader.

For its ground-breaking civilian helicopter operations and for its 38 years of flying helicopters in mountainous terrain and confined spaces, Okanagan Helicopters is recognized as a true pioneer of rotary-wing aircraft.