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Retired University of Central Oklahoma professor Bill VanOsdol is shown here at the controls of a B-17 en route to Alaska.

Pilot Flies B-17 During Tour

By Dennie Hall

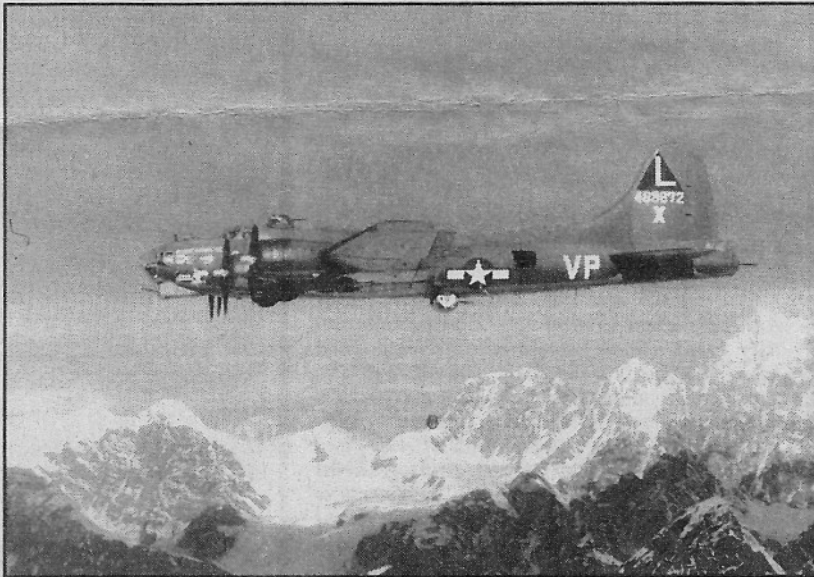
Special Correspondent

EDMOND — An icon of U.S. military history roared from Texas to Canada and Alaska this summer, giving an Edmond man time to recall days long gone.

Bill VanOsdol, a retired University of Central Oklahoma professor, took turns piloting a Boeing B-17G Flying Fortress as it lumbered across the country.

The plane, now owned by the Confederate Air Force's Gulf Coast Wing, evolved from the Boeing 299 to become the country's best known and respected heavy bomber of World War II, the B-17.

VanOsdol, a Navy man from 1945 to 1947, was one of the nine who flew the big bird on its mission this summer: getting pub-



—Photo Provided

Bill VanOsdol helped fly this B-17 across the country this summer.

Circling to land in Edmonton, the crew saw a building on fire. The news reporters left the airport and went to the fire scene, a chocolate factory. Without news coverage, business for

and let them dream. All of them were too young to have been World War II pilots." Arriving in Fairbanks, Alaska, was a welcome change with 80-degree temperatures.

ing museum, rather than having planes sit idly rusting away on static display," he added.

The Texas Raiders B-17 is sponsored by the Gulf Coast Wing in Houston. It is one

of only eight to 12 flying B-17s left in the world. The CAF has two of them. The other one, Sentimental Journey, is sponsored by the Arizona Wing.

Anyone interested in vintage aircraft, pilot or not, can join the CAF. The Oklahoma Wing meets at Wiley Post Airport in Oklahoma City.

VanOsdol has packed much life in his 70 years. He served in the Navy on the USS Barnes, an escort aircraft carrier. Since retiring from UCO four years ago he has been doing research on World War II projects, resulting in a book, "Famous Americans in WWII."

"I still have two planes, a Cessna Cardinal and a 52-year-old 7AC Champ training plane that I spent five years restoring," he said.

lic notice and raising funds for the plane's upkeep.

The "Texas Raiders," as this group is known, offered rides and tours of the plane when it made stops. It gulps fuel at the rate of 225 gallons an hour.

Departing Houston on May 31, the plane was loaded with 2,780 gallons of fuel and 37 gallons of oil for each of the four 1,200-horsepower engines. It spent four unscheduled days in Billings, Mont., undergoing repairs.

"We departed Billings on June 5 headed for Calgary, Canada, where we had been scheduled for a week," VanOsdol said. "We did one heck of a buzz fly-by over Runway 24 after we circled over Billings.

"We flew in and out of the clouds at around 8,000 feet most of the way to Calgary."

Before leaving there, the group called Red Deer. Hundreds of people, including the press, were waiting at the airport to see the plane.

tours, T-shirts and hats was scant.

In Grand Prairie, a woman jumped from her car and ran to the plane.

"She stood looking at it and simply poured out the tears as she told us her late husband had been a World War II bomber pilot," VanOsdol said. "Amazingly, even young people who had never seen a B-17 thanked us for bringing it to their city. That happened in every city we visited."

Strong head winds and turbulence greeted the group on the way to White Horse in the Yukon Territory. Ice formed on the plane's wings, tail and windshield.

"We stayed in White Horse a week with a disappointing turnout," VanOsdol said. "It was wet and cold most of the time. We were parked next to the only airline that was in and out, and each time the pilots would come over to admire our old propeller bird. We'd take them up to the cockpit

"There were media people all over the place," VanOsdol said. "We were the first B-17 in 40 years to fly into Alaska. We had a fantastic parade of people every day."

Likewise, the arrival in Anchorage found people fascinated with the old plane. The Air Force Association and Alaska's Legislature gave a banquet for the plane's crew and about 500 others.

The plane continued on tour to Juneau and then back across Canada, landing back in Texas on Aug. 14.

VanOsdol said the Texas Raiders B-17 is one of about 150 World War II planes sponsored by the Confederate Air Force, a volunteer group of people "who give of their time and spare change to maintain and fly the planes.

"The CAF considers its mission to be a fly-

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