

RCAF STATION TELEGRAPH COVE



Telegraph Cove (Kwak'wala: *tugwasu*) grew out of a one-room station established in 1912 at the northern terminus of the Campbell River telegraph line. Due to the steep banks and lack of foreshore the community was built on pilings and linked by a wooden boardwalk. In 1929 Fred Wastell and his family moved to Telegraph Cove and took over the salmon saltery and sawmill his father Duke Wastell had established. Fred and his partner, Alex Macdonald, built up a thriving sawmill supplying lumber for the airports being built on the West Coast due to the imminent danger of war. Soon the military was taking everything the mill could cut but keeping a crew was a challenge as the able-bodied men went to war and the Japanese

workers and families were evicted by the Canadian Government. With the demand for lumber outstripping production the Royal Canadian Air Force took command of Telegraph Cove Mill. They rented the mill at a nominal rate, retaining only Alex Macdonald as manager and Fred Wastell to deliver their lumber. The regular crew of twelve were replaced with sixty-five airmen, many with sawmill or marine experience so the Cove was soon humming with an air of purpose. Every building was packed with sawmill crew or support staff. Carpenters arrived to build another bunkhouse and a huge mess hall. The increased quantity of lumber produced by the RCAF crew was sent by scow to Port Hardy, Prince Rupert, Bella Bella, Coal Harbour and anywhere else on the Coast that lumber was needed.

The motor vessel *Hili-Kum* had also been rented, her glossy white paint covered in dark wartime grey, her mast bristling with aials and her cabin roof piled with life-saving equipment. Her crew of two increased to seven including a radio operator and a cook. A crash rescue boat was often stationed in the snug harbour.

By August 1945 the war was winding down and at four o'clock in the afternoon of August 14th, word was received that the war was over and the celebration was on. In early 1946 the mill and boat were returned to Fred and Alex and the airmen left. The sawmill continued providing custom-made lumber for boats and docks until the 1970's when the mill, saltery, and fish storage warehouses gradually yielded to Gordie Graham's era of pleasure boaters, kayakers, sport fishermen, whale watchers, and vacationers. Fortunately there are still a number of reminders of how important The Cove was to the war effort during WWII.



On September 26 2015, the 75th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain, 101 Squadron RCAFA and 19 Wing RCAF dedicated this plaque to commemorate the period 1941-1945 when Telegraph Cove was an RCAF Station