

Helicopter company sees bright future in oil and gas industry

A British Columbia company that has built an international reputation as an innovator in the industrial uses of helicopters expects to double its assets in the next ten years, according to company president John Pitts.

In 1979, Okanagan Helicopters Ltd. of Richmond, British Columbia, reported gross revenues in the order of \$60 million. "That is a tenfold increase in our revenues since the beginning of the decade," said Mr. Pitts. The 1979 earnings record marks the end of ten years of aggressive expansion and marketing of the company's operations. "We expect to double our present assets of \$100 million in the next ten years," he added.

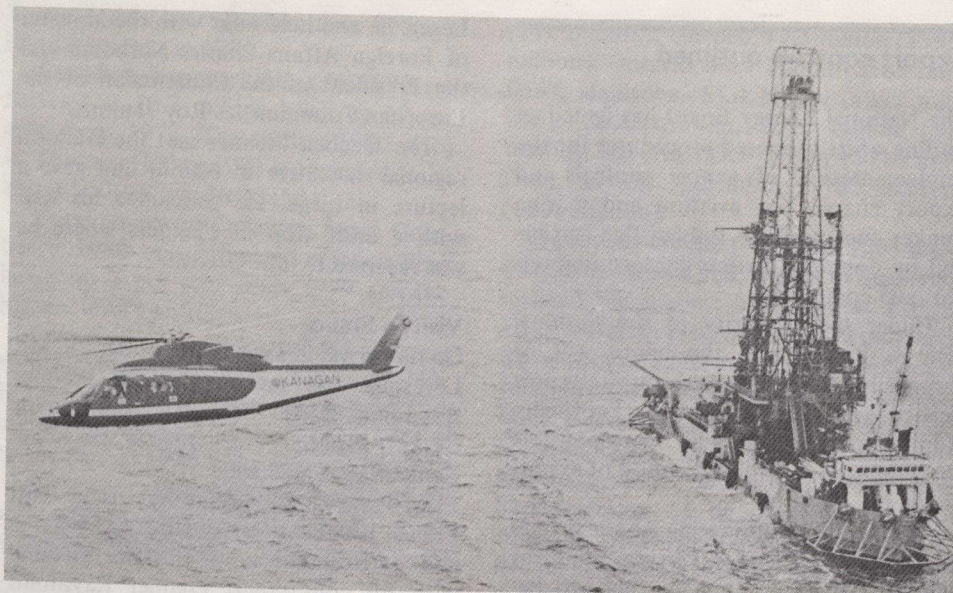
Okanagan is Canada's largest helicopter company and one of the three largest helicopter operators around the world. Okanagan has the resources, experience and expertise to bid on projects in any part of the globe. "In 1970, about 75 per cent of our business was in British Columbia," said Mr. Pitts. "In the last ten years we have expanded our business to the point where only 15 per cent of our work is undertaken in British Columbia," he said.

Okanagan's biggest customer has been the oil and gas industry in Canada and anywhere else oil and gas exploration is active. Most of the rest of the company's business comes from the forestry and mining industries, also in Canada and many other parts of the world.

With over 700 employees, the company maintains more than 40 permanent bases across Canada. Many of its overseas ventures are undertaken as joint ventures with helicopter companies based in the countries where the work is located. Amongst its fleet of Bell and Sikorsky helicopters the company maintains machines capable of doing any work a helicopter can be made to do.

Flying across oceans

Flying helicopters non-stop across thousands of kilometres of continents and oceans has also become routine for the Okanagan flying crews. In 1978, one crew established a flying record by flying a new Sikorsky S-61 helicopter from Ireland across the North Atlantic 8,000 kilometres (5,000 miles) to the company's home base at Vancouver International



Okanagan provides transportation for off-shore oil rig crews, equipment and provisions.

Airport in Richmond.

In 1965, a crew flew from the United States east coast to England recording the first unescorted flight of a helicopter across the North Atlantic.

Ten years later, another Okanagan crew undertook the longest helicopter ferry flight ever undertaken. The journey stretched 20,256 kilometres (12,741 miles) from Nova Scotia on Canada's Atlantic seaboard to Thailand and took 98 hours to complete.

Okanagan's Southeast Asian regional operation has its headquarters in Singa-

pore and oversees operations in the Philippines, Thailand and India. The company provides contract service to drilling operators including flight services for off-shore oil rig crews and transportation of equipment and provisions. The Singapore headquarters recently took delivery of two more helicopters bringing their total regional fleet to eight.

Okanagan has also started operations in Australia where they operate a total of six helicopters to provide services to off-shore drilling rigs off the Western Australia and Victoria coastlines.

Apprenticeship program planned to ease skilled labour shortage

The federal government has agreed to provide funding for an apprenticeship program aimed at alleviating the shortage of skilled labour in the Canadian auto parts industry.

The Canada Employment and Immigration Commission, co-operating with the Ontario government, has agreed to support the enrolment of at least 186 apprentices in the first year of a projected three-year plan.

Employment Minister Lloyd Axworthy has signed a letter of intent that calls for the commission to pay \$643,000 in the first year. The continuation of the project after that depends on government approval of more training funds and the success rate of the program's first phase.

Funding is based on a percentage of the wage paid to the apprentice during each year of the program. Training and

wage subsidy costs are estimated at \$10,000 for each apprentice.

In the next three years, the member companies of the Automotive Parts Manufacturers Association of Canada have agreed to train 335 people in such high skill occupations as tool-and-die makers, machinists, maintenance mechanics, mould-makers and welders.

In-school training will be provided by Ontario community colleges or by participating companies. The selected apprentice will have to spend a probationary period of employment with the company before taking part in the program.

If all goes smoothly, the number of apprentices will be increased in the second and third years.

The program is one of 30 approved by the federal government with various industrial associations in Ontario.