

Appendix C Biography: Richard “Dick” Probert

Richard “Dick” Probert, a native Kentuckian, was born on Valentine’s Day, Feb. 14, 1907.

He was and still is a widely known and respected aviation "Old Timer". During the early "forties" he was a principal in the Arlen-Probert Flying Service at the Van Nuys Metropolitan Airport. Richard Arlen was a movie star with several aviation feature films to his credit. Some were filmed at the Metro Airport.

Dick had soloed Andy Devine on December 2, 1941, but obviously Devine's further progress was interrupted by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor five days later.

After WW II ended he was looking for a good location to establish a new flying school along with Andy Devine. In the middle of 1946 they purchased the school, equipment, including the fleet of Interstates (airplanes) from Marvin Whiteman, the developer of Whiteman Airpark. Andy returned to flying after the Probert-Devine Aviation Corporation was established at Whiteman Airpark.

In 1947 Dick along with Andy Devine and Hank Halstead purchase the Big Bear City Airport. During the construction of some buildings at the airport they met Paul Parish a local entrepreneur /contractor who was a pilot himself. Paul and his partner, Perry Warren were having financial difficulties in a restaurant they were building. Dick, Andy and Hank bought into the restaurant venture and named the holding company as Sportsman’s Village. The restaurant was later named the Sportsman’s Tavern, which is currently operating as the Captain’s Anchorage.

After leaving the Big Bear area, Dick became involved with seaplanes and was instrumental in setting up an airline service from Los Angeles to Catalina Island. It was there that he met his last wife, Nancy Norma Ince. Her father was very well known in the film industry at that time. Nancy started with the company in 1954 and was promoted to chief stewardess in 1957. In 1965, Dick and Nancy were married.

From left to right Dick Probert, Nancy Probert and Captain Lloyd Burkhart



In 1957, Dick Probert purchased Sikorsky VS-44A flying boat and named it Excambian and after numerous setbacks, repaired it to flying condition. Probert flew the airplane from Ancon Harbor in Peru to Long Beach where, for the next ten years, the VS44 shuttled thousands of tourists between Long Beach and Catalina Island. It also served as the first air mail carrier to Catalina Island. *(In 1968, Probert sold the VS44 to Antilles Airboats in the Virgin Islands; however, it was severely damaged later that same year and was retired from service. After sitting for several years stranded on a beach, Antilles Airboats donated the VS44 to the Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola, Florida and is now on permanent loan to the New England Air Museum.)*

From 1958 to 1960 Dick worked in the film industry as a stunt pilot and actor. Most notable he was in 9 episodes of Sea Hunt with Lloyd Bridges.

In 1975 Dick and Nancy settled into a ranch in Annapolis, California, which is a town in Northern California with a population of approximately 1200 people. They named their ranch Rancho de los Aviadores, which is a 160-acre spread. It is Nancy who was the horse person. Probert and his wife Nancy were market breeders in Northern California for many years. Dick's lifelong passion was aviation, hence the name of their ranch, which is Spanish for "ranch of the aviators." There is a 2,500- foot runway on the property, as well as an old Phillips Steel biplane, which was renovated several years ago and is still operational. He was flying up to five years before his death.

The California Thoroughbred Breeders Association lost its oldest member on May 16, 2008 when Dick Probert passed away at the age of 101 at his home in Annapolis, California, in Sonoma County. He is survived by his fifth and last wife Nancy. They had no children of our own. Dick did have two children from a previous marriage. One daughter that survived him and one son that preceded him in death.