

The following is excerpted from *Metman in Wartime: Meteorology in Canada, 1939-1945*, pages 260-61, by Morley Thomas.

In January 1945 a large airborne paper balloon carrying instruments was shot down at Fort Simpson in the Northwest Territories. Over the next several weeks a large number of similar balloons were found on the ground in various parts of western Canada and the United States; one had traveled as far east as Michigan. The balloons were carried eastward in the prevailing westerly winds and were equipped with a pressure device that allowed the dropping of small bags of sand to enable it to maintain a constant elevation. After the altitude maintaining device was exhausted the balloon's mechanism was designed to drop its load of either a small explosive or an incendiary bomb.

The balloons caused little or no damage and all news of them was kept secret from the public at the time as any mention of them in the press or on radio was prohibited. Studies of the balloon problem were carried out in the United States and in Canada where the Canadian Army conducted investigation at Vancouver. There, at the Western Air Command forecast office, a meteorologist was assigned to assist by "back-tracking" the balloon from the point where it was found or sighted to a possible point of origin. Upper-level pressure maps were drawn and studied for the North Pacific at 20,000 and 30,000-foot levels (6.1 and 9.1 kilometers). Speeds and directions were estimated at these heights from the maps in order to calculate the probable paths of travel of the balloons. All projected paths were found to cross the Japanese islands and after the war it was confirmed that the balloons had been released from a site near Tokyo. It was also revealed that the Japanese stopped the program when they received no indication that the balloons had ever reached North America.