

Beyond the Sunset #1

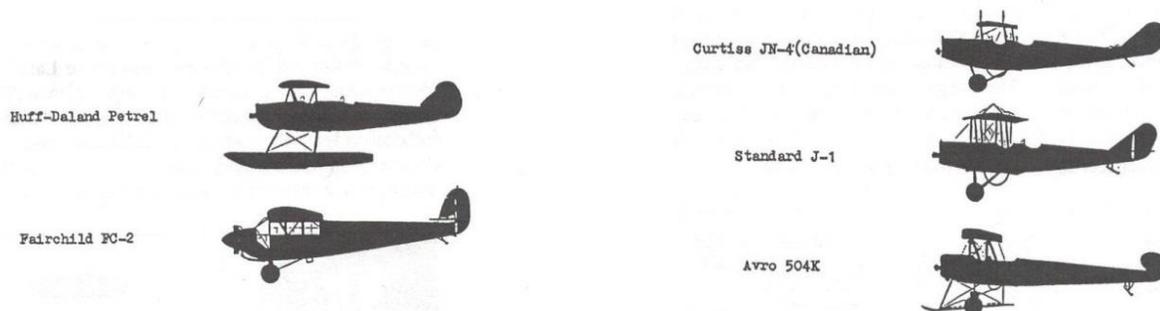
By George Fuller

This may be an appropriate time to look back at the early days of winter flying in Quebec. In the fall of 1917 it was decided to transfer most Royal Flying Corps - Canada pilot training to American airfields in Texas until the following spring. However, the 44th Wing stayed in operation at the Armour Heights and Leaside aerodromes near Toronto using ski- equipped Curtiss JN-4(Canadian) "Canuck" biplanes, the first winter flying in Canada.

After the Great War in 1919, ex-military Canucks began to fly in the Montreal area. In late November one of these was used by Harry Wilshire of R & W Air Service to deliver Santa Claus to Parc Jeanne Mance (Fletcher's Field) on his way to Goodwin's (now Eaton's) department store. It would have been difficult landing in this undulating, constricted space, in the best of weather, but by then it was covered with wet snow. The biplane lost a tire, but after minor repairs he was able to fly back to the Bois-Franc home field (later Cartierville Airport).

In early November 1921, Canadian Aerial Services biplanes operating from Bois-Franc were fitted with skis. They had Canucks and one rotary engined Avro 504K. The Avro was sent to Cochrane, Ontario (probably via railway) to be used in support of resources prospecting around the mouth of the Moose River on James Bay in February 1922. In it pilot/engineer Hervé St-Martin and Roy Maxwell made the first winter flight to the edge of James Bay on the 4th.

During the winter of 1922-23 at least one wingless Canuck fuselage was used to tow skiers at St-Jovite, Québec.



Silhouettes to common scale

Fairchild Aerial Surveys (of Canada) Ltd., based at Lac-à-la-Tortue leased a ski-equipped Standard J-1 biplane from the Curtiss Exhibition Co., Long Island NY, for the winter of 1923-24 so they could offer their services year round. However it was little used. In the following winter, their Huff-Daland Petrel floatplane with a liquid-cooled Wright Hispano-Suiza engine was fitted with skis and used for photography.

Relatively reliable winter operations by the company had to wait for the introduction of the Wright Whirlwind radial engine, first fitted to the Petrel in late 1926.

Bush flying in Canada on a dependable year round basis really began with the introduction of the Wright Whirlwind-powered Fairchild FC-2 mono- plane with heated cabin in the winter of 1927-28. The first convertible floatplane version in Canada was delivered to Fairchild Aerial Surveys at Lac-à-la-Tortue in the summer of 1927.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "George Gillies".

Sources:

Contemporary newspapers

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