



# WING MATE

Royal Canadian Air Force Association of Canada

Racing in the 1930s

Newsletter of 408-437 Wing



NOVEMBER 2019



## President's Message

Dear Members, our next General Meeting will take place on Monday 11 November. The 527 Legion is holding a Remembrance Day Service. All are welcome. The time has come again to honour those who willingly left home to face harm and danger, never to return again.

*THEY SHALL GROW NOT OLD, AS WE WHO ARE LEFT GROW OLD. AGE SHALL NOT WEARY THEM, NOR THE YEARS CONDEMN. AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN, AND IN THE MORNING, WE WILL REMEMBER THEM.*

Let us also remember our dear members most recently departed this year: Gord Hunter, Jacques Marion, Fred Stevens

### An Airman's Prayer

Lord, when I die  
 May you grant me grace  
 to pass with a smile upon my face  
 and then to make my end complete  
 may you grant my wish  
 that I die on my feet.  
 Pray grant me seconds  
 that my last thoughts be  
 with those I love, and who love me.  
 Be thy presence near when I depart  
 to cleanse all hatred from my heart  
 I crave no crowd when I'm laid away,  
 no floral wreath,  
 but just a spray  
 And just one true friend  
 who is standing by,  
 as I'm lowered down  
 just to say "Goodbye"



### Looking Back the Way It Was

Wicked Women

In July 1915, 30,000 women paraded in London under the banner, "We demand the right to serve." Women slowly began to take up jobs in war work, especially making weapons and ammunition. The miserable men didn't want women in the factories. They

thought it would give women a taste of freedom and change them. They were right! By the end of the war British women could smoke cigarettes openly, drink in public houses, and use cosmetics, wear short skirts and bras, and have short hair. They could also go to the cinema without a man and play football (soccer) In fact most factories started girls teams.

Then "Land Girls" who'd taken the jobs of farm labourers, began to wear their trousers off duty! Where would this go? In short they started doing all the things men had been doing for years. Okay, you didn't see a lot of men with lipstick, short skirts and bras...in those days and women still do these shocking thing to this day! Excerpt Terry Deary

### DEFENCE OF THE REALM ACT YOU MUST NOT

- 1.... loiter under a railway bridge
- 2.... send a letter overseas written in invisible ink
- 3.... buy binoculars without official permission
- 4.... fly a kite that could be used for signalling
- 5.... speak in a foreign language on the telephone
- 6.... ring church bells after sundown
- 7.... whistle in the street after 10pm for a taxi
- 8.... travel alone in a railway carriage over the Forth Bridge
- 9.... push a handcart through the streets at night without showing a red light at the back and a white light on the front

The army name for a tank was a "landship," but they collected lots of other names: Slug, Whale, Toad, Tortoise, Land crab, Behemoth, Boojum. The newspapers couldn't give away the secret by showing pictures, so the British writers described it as a "long, low, dust-coloured tortoise." French newspapers reported they were equipped in front with "some kind of cow catcher." But to most soldiers it looked like a water tank and that name stuck. (Mercifully). I'm wondering what the Armoured Corps would be called today if the name had not stuck.

On 14 October, Thanksgiving Monday, the more intrepid members, the few and the brave, joined us for our usual monthly General Meeting with donuts provided by Mort to go with the coffee. **Cecile Thompson** entertained us with a very interesting talk and a display of her time living in Japan. Thank you Cecile. To our profit John McClean decided to come in from the cold and renew his Wing membership. Welcome back John!



## 110 Black Hawk Squadron

Royal Canadian Air Cadets

With Cécile Thomson



## 818 Toronto Falcon Squadron

Royal Canadian Air Cadets

With Jackie Johnston



Our squadron this fall has over 250 cadets. As wonderful as this can be, there are also a few problems as a result.

The gym is too small for the CO's parade. We will have to come up with an alternative arrangement.

The November 28th banquet will be held at an Asian restaurant but we are wondering if it will be able to accommodate all of our boys and girls *and* their parents!

With so many talents to choose from, we often qualify for regional competitions — the latest being orienteering. A Junior Individual female, Amanda Hoang, and an Intermediate Individual male, Bill Jiang, will take part in the Ottawa finals.

With so many participating on Tag Days, we can count on banking around \$20,000 spring and fall!

The cadets at 818 had a busy and productive October. Ground School classes began October 2nd for candidates in both glider and power. Classes will run every Wednesday from 6:30-9:00.

Clubs have started, including drill, sports and effective speaking.

On Sunday, October 20th the squadron was flying at CFB Borden.

On Saturday, October 26th cadets will visit the Warplane Heritage Museum in Hamilton.

The cadets will be in full dress for a CO's parade on Monday, October 28th.



## RCAF Pilot Honoured

David Charles Fairbanks, who flew with the RCAF during the Second World War, has been honoured in his hometown of Ithaca, New York. A Tempest fighter pilot with 15 victories to his credit, he was three times awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Fairbanks joined the RCAF as a 19-year old in 1941, before the United States had entered the Second World War. He reached the rank of squadron leader as commanding officer of 274 RAF Squadron before



being shot down himself on February 28, 1945, and spent the last few months of the war as a prisoner of war.

Post-war, David returned to Ithaca and earned a degree in engineering at Cornell University in Ithaca. He then returned to Canada and was soon hired by Russell Bannock as a test pilot with de Havilland Canada (DHC). "At de Havilland we were looking for an additional test and demo pilot when Fairbanks applied," says Bannock. "At the time, Dave was working in Montreal, flying Vampires with one of the Montreal reserve squadrons and held a Commercial Pilot Licence. When I looked at his logbook, I said 'Wow!' and hired him on the strength of his experience. He soon showed us that he could be a skilled test pilot."

David eventually became Manager of Flight Operations for DHC. In May 2019 he was posthumously inducted as a Member of Canada's Aviation Hall of

Fame, largely for his work with DHC in development of Short Takeoff and Landing Aircraft such as the Dash 7 and was involved with promotion of the Beaver, Twin Otter, Caribou and Buffalo in countries around the world. Sadly, Fairbanks died at the age of 52 in 1975.



Above left, Russ Bannock, DSO DFC, himself a member of Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame, hands the induction certificate for David Fairbanks to retired USAF Major General Mike Hall, for placement of the certificate in a historical display at The History Center in Tompkins County, located in Ithaca.

From CAHS Newsletter, October 2019



Our Wing Reps at the AGM in Kingston, May 2019

Left to right: Cécile Thompson, Nick Czernkovich, Barbara Newman

## Air Races

During the Depression years in the 1930s, many individuals used current technologies and fielded air racers for fame and fortune. The National Air Races sprouted up in major American cities.

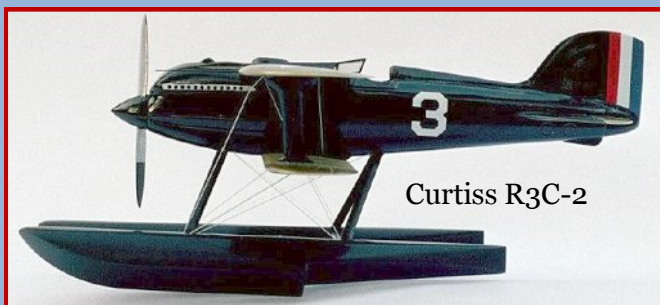
At air races, brightly colored pylons marked the course, creating a race track in the sky. In Cleveland, they were a red and white checkerboard. Most races had three pylons in a triangular pattern, with the press and officials standing in the pylons.

Pilots flew as close to the pylons as they could in order to cut their time. Racer Jimmy Doolittle perfected the art of rounding the pylons by diving down, zooming around the pylon, and then climbing high.

The most famous events of the National Air Races were the Thompson Trophy closed-course race and the Bendix Trophy transcontinental race. A new generation of daredevil pilots joined Jimmy Doolittle to make air racing and speed an increasingly popular aspect of American culture.

The Pulitzer Trophy Race was the most popular of the National Air Races in the early 1920s. The annual races were meant to be the high point of the air racing year, much as the Indianapolis 500 was for auto racing enthusiasts.

Lt. Cyrus K. Bettis of the U.S. Army Air Service won the 1925 Pulitzer Trophy Race in his Curtiss R3C-1 racer. It was designated R3C-1 when equipped with wheels and R3C-2 with floats.



Curtiss R3C-2

Bettis and the R3C-1 were the world's fastest pilot and airplane in 1925 winning the Pulitzer Trophy Race with a speed of 248.9 mph.

Jimmy Doolittle won the Schneider, Bendix, and Thompson Trophy races, thus becoming one of the greatest pilots in air racing history. He retired from racing at the height of his career, doubting the continuing value of air racing in terms of advancing technology versus the lives it cost.

In the Thompson Trophy event pilots raced each other around pylons. Doolittle won in 1932 with an average speed of 253 miles per hour. It took all of Doolit-



Jimmy Doolittle passes the Bendix pylon low and fast during the 1932 Thompson Trophy race

tle's flying skill to keep the unstable and unforgiving barrel-shaped Gee Bee R-1 Super Sportster under control.



Curtiss R3C-1





Bettis (Left) & Doolittle 1925 Pulitzer Race

For America's air racers of the 1930s, the premier event was the National Air Races. Nothing on earth could compare with the event. Begun in the 1920s as an odd collection of racing events, military demonstrations, stunt-flying and parachuting exhibitions, the National Air Races had grown by the 1930s into the nation's outstanding aeronautical event. Some of the races measured endurance. Others measured speed and skill in the tight and treacherous closed-course races.

During the 1930s, the National Air Races were generally held at Cleveland. Occasionally, however, the event was moved to other venues when attendance or local interest began to wane in its hometown. In 1933 and 1936, for instance, the races were held in Los Angeles. In 1930, they were held in Chicago.

From 1930 until it was ended in 1939, the Thompson Trophy Race provided the climactic final event of each year's National Air Races meeting. It was also the premier closed-course race in the world.

Although the courses varied in length and shape, the races were generally flown over a course of about 10 miles long with 50-foot-high pylons marking the turns. With their high speeds and wing-tip-to-wing-

tip flying, the closed-course races were loaded with breathtaking action.

One innovation that brought more appeal to the Thompson Trophy and the National Air Races was the massed start for the closed-course events. Instead of taking off at timed intervals, as had been the custom at most closed-course air races before that time, the planes in the National Air Races took off together.

Lined up on the field side by side at about 100-foot intervals, the planes took off 10 seconds apart. Each cleared a staging pylon, which equalized the interval. And once the planes passed onto the course, each competitor was in his relative position on the course. The arrangement, unlike timed events, made competition wing tip to wing tip and helped make the events more exciting by allowing competitors and spectators alike to see just how daring the competition really was.

Death was not an uncommon occurrence in any form of air racing in the 1930s. Close flying, low altitudes, and high speeds, however, made the Thompson Trophy races particularly dangerous events. Death was a constant companion for the competitors, and each year the death of another competitor seemed to mar the event.

Point-to-point racing, rather than closed-course events, was probably the most common type of racing in the 1920s and 1930s. It was, however, less popular with the crowds than the closed-circuit races. Confined to their seats in grandstands, the spectators got little more than a brief glimpse of the racers as they flew across the field to cross the finish line at the end of the race.

Nonetheless, the challenge of long-distance racing attracted the attention of the aviation industry, and the idea of a cross-country race appealed to the popular imagination. With the Bendix Trophy, just such an event became an integral part of the National Air Races. And, like the Thompson Trophy, the Bendix Trophy quickly became the most important contest of its kind in the world.



The routes over which the Bendix Trophy Race was run varied. When the Nationals were held in Cleveland, the race was run between Los Angeles, and the Ohio city. When the Nationals were held in Los Angeles, as they were for two years, the Bendix Trophy became a truly transcontinental race, being run between New York and Los Angeles.

Fame followed Doolittle when he left the Army in 1929 after having won the Schneider Trophy seaplane race for the U.S. in 1925. He became a civilian air racer, working for the Shell Oil Company promoting its aviation fuels at the nation's air races. In 1931, Doolittle won the first Bendix Trophy Race by flying his Laird Super Solution between Los Angeles and Cleveland in 9 hours, 10 minutes and 21 seconds. Doolittle then continued on to Newark, N.J., to set a new transcontinental record of 11 hours, 16 minutes and 10 seconds.

The following year, Doolittle, flying the accident-plagued Gee Bee R-1, proved himself to be equally adept at closed-course racing by winning the Thompson Trophy Race. Doolittle retired from racing shortly after his 1932 victory. Nonetheless, his career as an aviator was far from over. During World War II, Doolittle returned to the Army and won his greatest fame by leading his famed carrier-based B-25 bombing raid on Tokyo early in 1942.



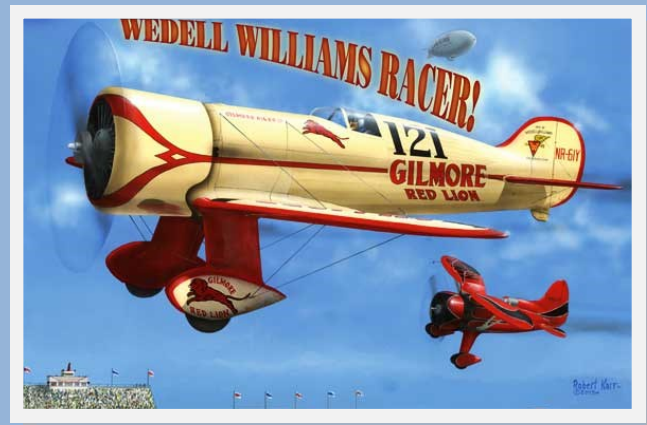
California-based flamboyant air racer Roscoe Turner was famous for his flying uniform, which consisted of a canvas flying helmet, a sky blue blazer with a large set of wings over the pocket, fawn-colored breeches and riding boots. Turner was the sport's greatest showman. His wide, toothy smile and large handlebar mustache made him the consort of movie stars and the darling of the newsreels. During his career, he won the Bendix Trophy (1933) from New York to Los Angeles in his modified Wedell-Williams Model 44. He also won the Thompson Trophy three times, to become the only multiple winner of the event.

The unlimited racing planes of the day were not, as a general rule, the products of large aircraft companies. Instead, they were the creations of small firms or even the work of individuals. Generally, air racing was a sport for those who faced the danger in hopes that the fame and prize money resulting from the racing events would help establish them in the aviation industry.



Jimmy Wedell

Air racer and designer Jimmy Wedell built some of the best racing planes of the 30s. He won the 1933 Thompson Trophy and built three planes in a hangar in a sugar cane field in the little town of



Patterson, Louisiana. The record for those three planes included three victories in the Bendix Trophy Race and two victories for the Thompson Trophy. He broke the world record for land-plane speed in 1933 when he clocked 305.33 m.p.h. in a Wedell-Williams aircraft of his own design.



his career building small, fast planes for bootleggers during the prohibition.

Air racer and racing plane builder, Benny Howard, built a number of very popular and successful racers. His most famous, *Mister Mulligan*, won both the Bendix and Thompson Trophy races in 1935. He was said to have begun



Increased speed was attained by cutting down wings, control surfaces, and cockpits to absolute minimums, then installing as big an engine as the plane could stand. All too often such racing planes



Benny Howard & His DGA-4 "Mike"

proved to be unstable and contributed to the growing number of fatalities. And of all the planes of the 1930s, none had more of a reputation as killers than the infamous Gee Bees.

The Granville Gee Bee Model Z was the first of the Super Sportster aircraft built by Granville Brothers Aircraft of Springfield, Massachusetts with the sole intent of winning the Thompson Trophy, which it did in 1931. However, it soon suffered a fatal crash during a world speed record attempt, starting the reputation of the Gee Bee aircraft as killers.



The name Gee Bee was taken from the name of the planes' manufacturer, Granville Brothers. No one denied that the resulting planes were fast. In the first of these super-racers, the Model Z, pilot Lowell Bayles covered the 100 miles of the 1931 Thompson Trophy Race in 25 minutes, 23.88 seconds to win easily with an average speed of 236.239 mph.

In 1932 Jimmy Doolittle flew the second Gee Bee

racer, the R-1, to victory in the Thompson Trophy Race at a record speed of 252.686 mph, and he also set a landplane speed record of 294.38 mph during trials for the event.

It was essentially the smallest possible airframe constructed around the most powerful available engine, a supercharged Pratt & Whitney R-985 "Wasp Junior" radial engine, producing 535 horsepower.

Unfortunately, however, the Gee Bees proved as deadly as they were fast. Lowell Bayles was killed in a crash of a second Gee Bee after a refueling stop at Indianapolis during the 1933 Bendix Trophy Race. Even the smaller Gee Bee racer would take its toll as well. Female air racer Florence Kilingensmith and even Granny Granville himself would die in Gee Bee crashes. In all, three of the large racing Gee Bees were built, and each would crash, killing its pilot. It was definitely tricky to fly.

For the industry, the war in Europe promised to be both a greater test of aircraft performance and a more lucrative market than any race could ever hope to be.

As the decade waned, it became increasingly difficult to attract enough planes to make up a field. With the retirement of the Henderson brothers after the 1939 races, the Nationals came to an end. The 1939 event was the last time the races were held until after World War II. □



## North York Women's Shelter

Although the new building was to open this past summer, several delays that included a nine-week labour dispute have resulted in its opening this winter. Sister shelters enabled the beds to be available throughout the period that began with the 2017 closing of the former building.

The new facility will feature 17 bedrooms, four lounges, two kitchens, an outdoor play area, pet kennels, a community services hub and a primary health clinic. For more information, visit [nyws.ca](http://nyws.ca).

# Air Racers of the 1930s Quiz



1.



5.



2.

Set airspeed record 1935



6.

Wedell-Williams Model 44



3.

Fastest in world in 1932



7.

Laird Super Solution



4.

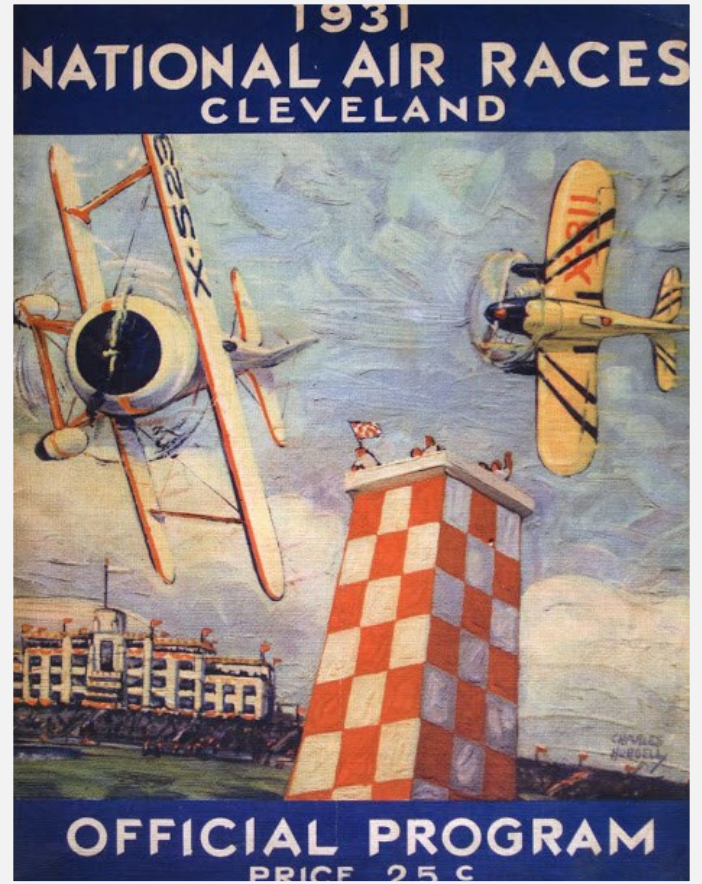
Dan Shumaker Collection

1000aircraftphotos.com



8.

Answers: 1. Travelair Type R 2. Hughes H-1 Racer 3. Gee Bee R-1 4. Folkerts SK-3 5. Gee Bee R-2 6. Wedell-Williams Modell 44 7. Laird Super Solution 8. Chester Jeep



## Lest We Forget...

**2019**

The Wing records with sadness the passing of...

Gordon Hunter 157730 — 16 January

Jacques Marion 603670 — 27 February

W/C Fred Stevens 25839 — 11 October

408-437 Toronto-York Wing



### Fred Stevens

**F**red was a long-time member of the Air Force Association and the Air Crew Association and possibly one of its founders. He contributed his time unselfishly, accepting a variety of Executive positions. Significantly, he maintained watch over our activities viz-a-viz our rules, by-laws and traditions. He was our shepherd during 2010 when we transitioned from an international organization to a single unit in Toronto. At that time he cleverly and audaciously ensured that every member had a vote on every item that had a modicum of contention. Most importantly, he ensured that individuals were recognized for their successes. Mort Lightstone

\* Obituaries for Gord Hunter and Jacques Marion appeared in the March, 2019 issue of *Wing Mate*.

