

ESTABLISHING FLYING RECORDS AT FORT SIMPSON.

By F.C. Jackson.

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Being a new-comer in the North Country I cannot compete with the fine "Dog Records" that have appeared in the "BEAVER" FROM time to time, but I will try to contribute something new in the way of "Flying Records".

Imagine my surprise on arriving back at Fort Simpson on the evening of Thursday, March 31st 1921 with Mr. P.H. Godwell, who had been on an inspection trip to the Company's posts at Forts Wrigley, Norman, and Good Hope, to see two aeroplanes of the monoplane type "sitting" in the field behind the Police Barracks. In fact, at first I thought that my eyes must be deceiving me, for I had been thinking during the last few days of the trip, what a much more comfortable mode of travel flying would be, compared with "mushing" along behind a team of fast Hudson's Bay dogs. But no! It was no pipe dream, for on the following day I went along to investigate, and there they were, two squat, powerful, compact little "buses", capable of flying at an average speed of ninety miles per hour, carrying a ton of freight, with seats for a pilot and a navigator, and a little cabin behind for four passengers.

The machines are quite a new departure in the commercial type, being of all metal construction, excepting the landing skis and the propeller of black walnut. They are the property of the Imperial Oil Company, and were on their way to the "Oil Fields" below Norman. The combined crews consisted of five men, and they had with them Sergt. H. Thorne, who was returning from Edmonton after taking out an Indian from Fort Providence, ^(Albert LeBeau) charged with murder. Sergt. Thorne took eight weeks on his trip out with dogs, and made the return journey in eight hours actual flying time. That is the first of the records that were made. Eight hours travel from Peace River to Fort Simpson.

One of the machines in landing had the great misfortune to break a propeller, owing to one ~~the~~ ski giving way under the strain of landing ^{an air-rocket in} a soft snow bank. As no spare propellers were carried, this looked a very serious obstacle at first, but Capt. G.W. Gorman, who is in charge, nothing daunted, began to cast around for ways and means of manufacturing a new "prop", and arranged for the other plane to ~~should~~ proceed to Fort Norman, as soon as possible. - Fort Norman Wells being target.

Now! to make a propeller is by no means an easy operation,

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When you are planted down in a place some eight weeks' dog journey from the nearest rail-head, and within a few degrees of the Arctic Circle. The broken propeller was made by an Ohio firm, Hartzell's, and was built up of nine pieces of black walnut, glued together in a block, nine feet long by twelve inches wide and eight inches thick; cut to shape by the most accurate of machinery, finished off by highly trained wood-workers, and tipped with copper.

What a contrast!. The materials at hand at Fort Simpson were a few old dog-sleigh boards, some raw moose-hide^{skinf} which could be boiled down for glue. - Copper tips were not to be thought of.

^{p.3.} ^{Walter} Johnson, engineer in the Company's service, undertook to make the propeller, along with ^{Sill} Mr. Hill, one of the flying party.

The tools they had to work with were a few steamer^{boat} clamps for the glue-ing process, a ship's adze, auger, hammer and chisel, axes, and draw-knives. Well! The chances of turning out a propeller of modern design, capable of standing the strain of 1500 revolutions per minute from a hundred-and-eighty horse-power motor, and of driving a machine of a total weight of about two tons through the air at a speed of ninety miles an hour, looked pretty slim; but the work went- was started on the auspicious date of April 1st. in the Roman Catholic Mission's work-shop.

I might pause here to mention the effect that the arrival of the machines had on the Indians. They were first startled by the dull droning of the engines coming from away up in the skies, and wondered what huge birds could be coming north again at such an early date, and with such a loud whirring of wings. Then the cry went up. "Two beeg beeg birds" and following the natural impulse of the born hunter, ~~sucked~~ in they rushed for their guns. As the machines grew nearer and took on such enormous size, one or two made for the bush, and then a woman shrieked, "OH! there is men in it, dont shoot", and in a motherly way held out her arms to catch the falling airmen.

4 Those of the natives who did not see the machines arrive, could not be convinced when they saw them on the ground, testing out the engines, that they would fly.

t 3.

"Why! They said, their wings wont move". But Chippy-Coat, our local Indian inventive genius, ^{and medicine man} casually remarked that he could make one if they gave him enough tin, *(for his prestige had been attacked)*

From this point, bad luck seemed to dog the airmen's footstips, or rather their propellers; ~~although~~ the Indian explanation was that somebody had put "bad medicine" on them.

The second machine with four men in her, after a few test flights started out for Normans on Tuesday. She taxied along the ground for about a hundred yards and began to rise gracefully when her right ski dipped, and in the flash of an eye the machine was spread eagled on the snow with a broken undercarriage, and Woe! a broken propeller. Fortunately no one was hurt, ~~the slightest~~. Now things did look hopeless. But more boards, some hewn out with the axe by local Indians were glued up for a second propeller.

Now listen, all ye incredulous ones! on Friday April 15th the first home-made propeller was given a thorough test of three-quarters of an hour flying by Mr. Kimol Pullerton, ~~was~~ ^{and} ~~when~~ the machine was put through all her stunts, ~~and~~ The second propeller was given a similar test on Wednesday, April 20th by Capt. Gorman, and now all is nearly ready for the return trip to Peace River and amongst other junk, the aviators ^{have kindly agreed to} ~~will~~ carry this article *for The Beaver!*

Great credit is reflected on the workmanship of ^{Walter} ~~Mr.~~ Johnson (who has never before seen an aeroplane of modern design at close quarters) for I think it can be safely stated that this accomplishment ranks highly with other recent aircraft records, as being the first time a propeller has been made and worked successfully so far from civilisation and the base of supplies. In fact, these "props" might be labelled, "MADE IN THE BUSH".