

Flying Fire Trucks

The History of Aerial Fire Fighting in Canada

UPDATE 17 - 2008

Sometimes I wondered if anyone actually read my website, or if my website was of any value. I finally received an answer to that question. While at an unrelated aviation event in my local air museum, a complete stranger came up and asked if I was the same Trevor McTavish writing a book about fire bombing? Here was someone not-connected with the industry that had found my website and learned about what I was doing. Almost as important, was that he mentioned a couple friends were also interested.

Shortly after I emailed the 2007 update, I sat down with Peter Weinkoff to talk about his time flying tankers. Peter started off in PBYs for the province of Saskatchewan, moving on to the CL-215. He's since worked for Buffalo Airways, flown a contract in Greece, and has returned to Saskatchewan. Along with our talk, Peter supplied me with a list of pilots from Saskatchewan, and I've been contacting them as time permits.

A big thank you to Dan Dertien and Elwood White. Elwood was a prolific photographer, and with Dan's help, he's sharing his fantastic collection of early BC fire bomber photos with me. During an unrelated visit to Vancouver Island, I met Elwood in person, and received a bunch of information about his photographs - a nice touch when you're trying to put together captions.

I've had to add more operators to Section 4; B.C. Air Lines Ltd., Husky Aircraft and West Coast Air Services Ltd. I had no idea that all three of these companies were involved with fire fighting. Luckily I was able to talk with people who were involved with them and get most of the information I needed to complete the chapters. In fact, one of these men referred me to a friend who flew water bombers for Pacific Western Airlines which allowed me to bring that chapter to an end.

Unfortunately I didn't have the same luck with the new chapter on Northland Airlines Ltd., Midwest Airlines Ltd. and Transair Ltd. - they're the same airplanes - the companies just merged and bought each other out. If anyone knows anything about their water bombing activities, I'd really like to hear from you.

I made contact with Gerry Connor, one of the owners of G&M Aircraft Ltd. the last of the B-25 operators. He was quite forthcoming with information, and I'm sure I'll be making good progress on that story.

My wife's family had a reunion and memorial service in Lac la Biche, AB, in July, and while the trip wasn't productive from stand point of my book, it did allow me to get a couple action shots of Air Spray's CL-215s taking off. I've gathered phone numbers, and will hopefully return next summer with my camera, notepad and a bunch of questions for the rapid-attack crews based there.

In mid-August, after years of saying I was heading there, I finally made it to Saskatchewan to visit the bases at Prince Albert and La Ronge. In both cases the crews were friendly and accommodating; we took photos, asked questions, and even managed to arrange an air-to-air photo shoot with two Trackers. It was perfect.

All in all, I'm happy to say that I've made a lot of progress. Easily more than I'd made in the last two years. It's a good feeling and I hope your interest, like mine, has been renewed.

Trevor McTavish