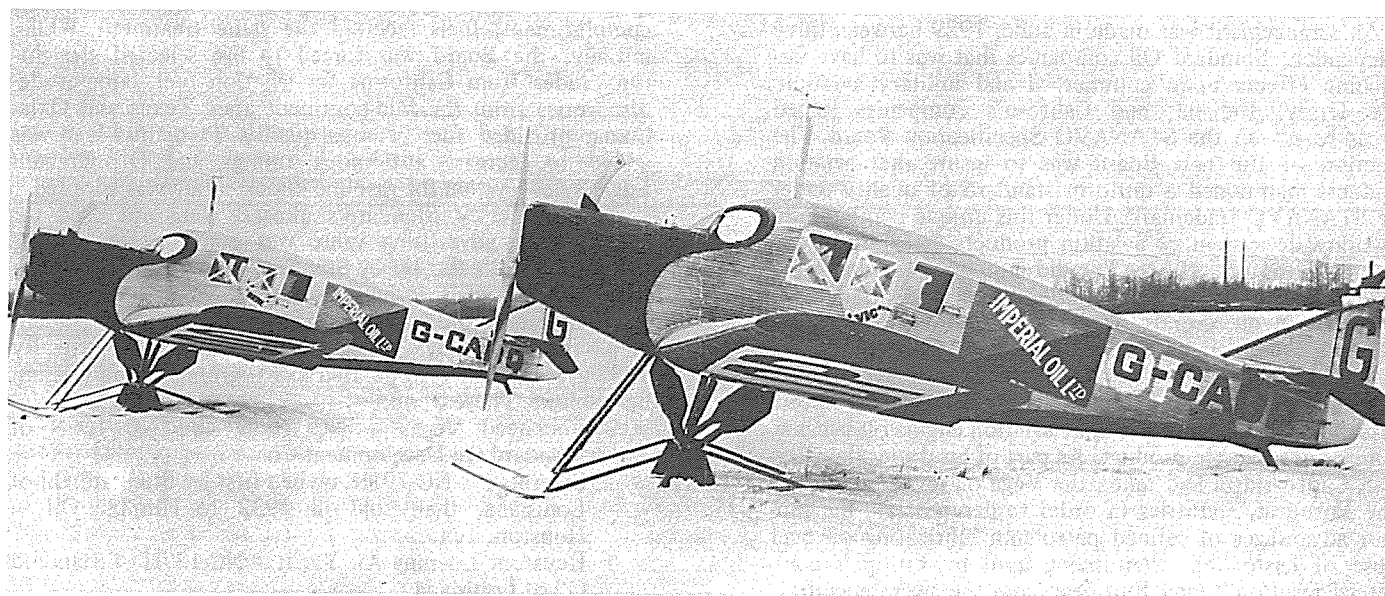


"PROJECT OILWINGS"



Imperial Oil Company's famous twins, RENE and VIC, circa 1920. (Photo — Imperial Oil Co.)

The progress of the Society's PROJECT OILWINGS has settled to a steady pace as letters and photographs continue to come to the editorial offices and to the Committeemen. Much in oil company history as connected with and influenced by the aviation industry has been re-discovered and new areas have been outlined for further research. An interesting explanation of the widely spread Standard Oil affiliates and independent companies was provided by the following brief account from David R. Winans.

The first commercial-type airplanes were purchased by Imperial Oil Company, Ltd., a Canadian affiliate of Standard Oil Co. of New Jersey, in 1920 and appeared over Canadian skies in January 1921. These were bought through the New York Junkers-Larsen dealer, shiny, all-metal German-built Junkers Jr. 13's, the identical model then being used by the U. S. Air Mail Service. They became the first commercial aircraft used in Canada by a private oil company.

After delivery to Edmonton, Alberta, by ex-WW I pilots Captain Wilfred R. "Wop" May and Lieutenant George W. Gorman, the two airplanes were readied for their first mission for Imperial Oil. Assigned registrations G-CADQ and G-CADP, they were also christened, RENE and VIC, respectively by Mrs. McQueen, the wife of Imperial's vice president.¹ Their first mission was to fly several company representatives up to Fort Norman, Northwest Territory, where the previous year had seen the discovery and drilling of the first oil well in the Canadian northwest.

A series of mishaps beset the two machines from the beginning. Not the least of these was the severe winter weather, with temperatures ranging down to 50° below zero. Although the airplanes left their Peace River, Alberta landing strip on 24 March, 1921, it was not until 3 June that one of them reached Fort Norman. The other one was out of service for lack of spares. By this time gasoline was being distilled at the well site at a rate of 35 gallons per day, thus furnishing an ample supply for the ship's return to civilization. These airplanes were among the early pioneers in bush flying and they also pointed out advantages

to be gained through aerial photography and exploration.²

Jersey Standard, even in 1921, was no stranger to aviation. When the Wright Brothers' FLYER first became airborne at Kittyhawk on that historic date of 17 December 1903, Standard motor gasoline was in its tiny fuel tank. The fuel, obtained at Elizabeth City, North Carolina, was ferried by sailboat to a nearby beach for the flight, and lubricating oil was available from the same source.

A great boost had been given to American commercial aviation by Charles A. Lindbergh's courageous flight from New York to Paris in May 1927. Almost overnight aircraft companies sprang into existence. Engine manufacturers were encouraged to break away from their cautious post-war attitudes. Developments of both water and air-cooled engines were needed but although Lindbergh's flight was made possible by a combination of reliable power plant and the best available aviation fuel, the fuel problem prevented engine manufacturers from realizing the full potential of particularly, the radial engine. This was noted by the oil companies and plans were made to rectify the situation.

In July, 1928 Jersey Standard established an aviation department under the direction of the Standard Oil Development Company. Captain Edwin E. Aldrin,³ formerly assistant commanding officer of the Army Air Corps' Engineering School at Wright Field, became first pilot and was placed in charge of the new department. In order to facilitate the development and testing of new aviation products, two airplanes were ordered to supplement the company's first airplane then being operated by the aviation sales promotion department.

The first airplane was a Buhl Special "Air Sedan," NC6873, that had been purchased earlier that year. The second, Lockheed "Vega" 5, c/n 20, registration number X 7440, was delivered at Mines Field, Los Angeles, to Capt. Aldrin on 17 September 1928. The third airplane, a Curtiss "Robin," c/n G-4, NC 153E, was delivered on 15 October. Only the "Vega" was based at Newark, (N.J.) Airport. The Buhl went to Standard Oil Co. of Louisiana, while the Robin was temporarily assigned to the Gilbert

and Barker Manufacturing Co., of Springfield, Mass. G&B was an affiliate responsible for building gasoline pumps and airfield refueling equipment. The Robin was fitted out as a flying showroom to tour airports throughout the eastern marketing area.

An arrangement was made in June, 1929 between three independent Standard Oil companies that was to have far-reaching effects upon commercial and military aviation. The Jersey, Indiana, and California companies joined forces to set up the STANAVO Specification Board. The function of the new Board was to insure that aviation products maintained a uniform standard of quality under the STANAVO trademark. Under this unique combination a worldwide system of aviation products distribution was set up. Although STANAVO did not own as much as a sparkplug, the soon to be famous flying eagle trademark appeared on all aircraft owned by the three companies, which had admittedly caused some confusion among laymen.

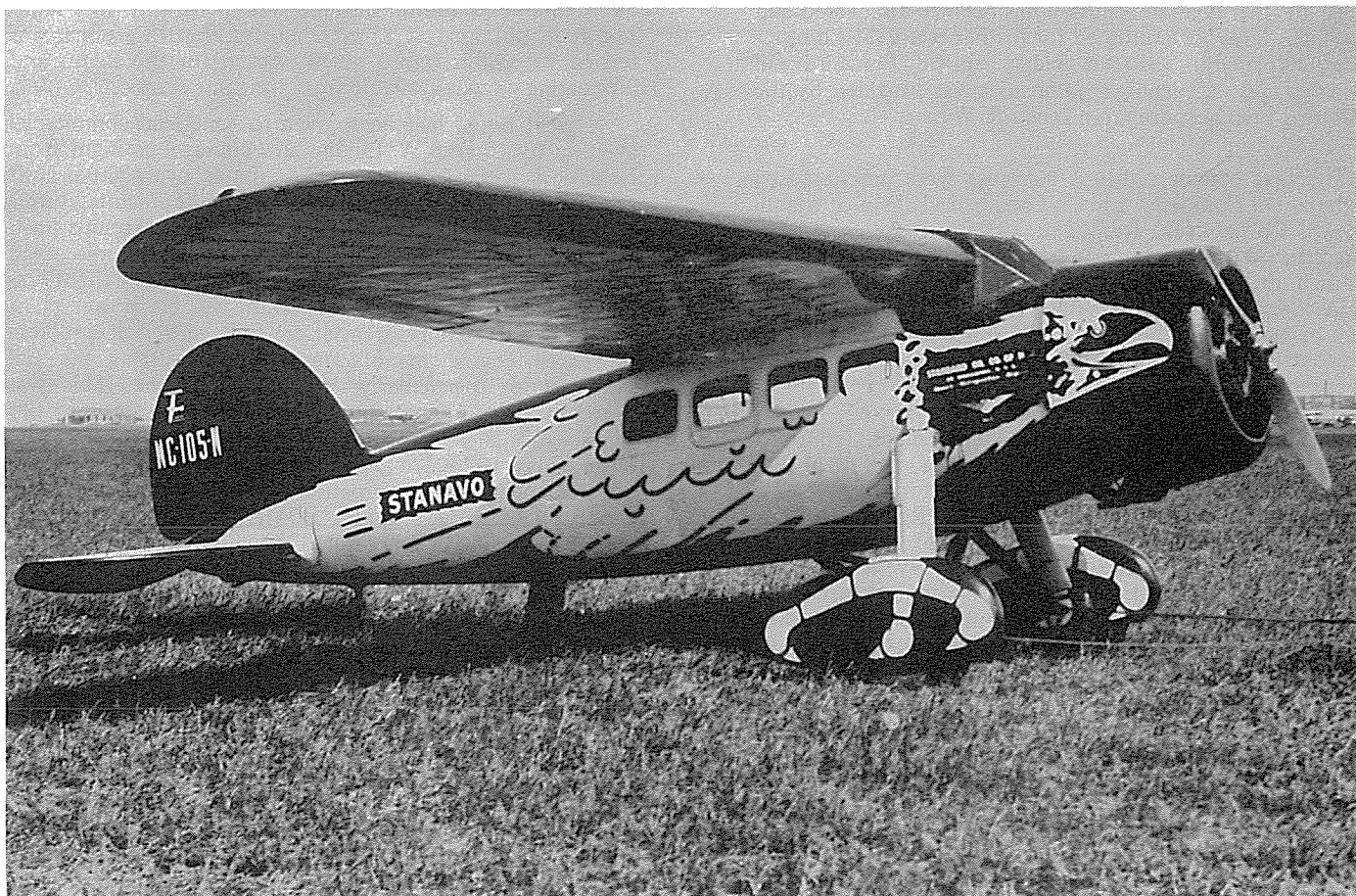
The first order of business for the STANAVO Specification Board was to insure that aviation engine oil became a uniformly reliable product. As part of his duties the previous year, Capt. Aldrin had taken the Vega on an aerial tour of nine European countries in order to demonstrate the superior advantages of refined petroleum lubricating oil over those of castor oil, then being used by Europe's commercial aviation. Many European countries were encouraging their farmers to raise castor beans, and governments were naturally hesitant to adopt a better oil for aircraft usage. Aldrin's demonstration with the company Vega helped to change this way of thinking.

By February 1931 STANAVO had made available six grades of aviation oil. New refining techniques had been investigated by the three oil company members, and the first aviation lubrication chart was issued covering the requirements of all types of engines. Along with this accomplishment, fuels received the same treatment. While, initially, the Board was forced to use selected straight-run crudes from California for aviation fuel, later crude discoveries from the Mid-continent area, Texas and Oklahoma, provided fuel of equal quality. Tetraethyl lead was added to increase anti-knock ratings and Dr. Graham Edgar's new system for gasoline knock rating was adopted.

Though Jersey Standard's aircraft were not used for racing, their advertising value was considerable. During the early 1930's the Jersey Standard Lockheed Vegas, with their familiar eagle insignia, were known throughout the U. S. One or more of these airplanes were always present at air meets and races to "show the flag" as it were. By 1932 Jersey affiliates operated eight aircraft in the western hemisphere. These were:

- 2 Lockheed Vegas — NC 105N and NC 106N of Standard Oil Development Co.
- 1 Stearman — NC 791H, owned first by Standard Oil of Louisiana, then sold in 1932 to Humble Oil in Houston, Tex.
- 1 Keystone-Loening Air Yacht — NC 137H of Standard Oil of Louisiana.
- 1 Fairchild 71 — NC 755Y, Standard Oil of Venezuela.
- 1 Hamilton seaplane (reg # unknown) of Andian National Corp., Colombia.
- 2 Sikorsky S-38B amphib. — NC 2V of Creole Pet. Corp.

MORE COMMITTEEMEN ARE NEEDED FOR PROJECT OILWINGS. WRITE PROJECT LEADER



Lockheed Vega, C/n 117, NC 105N, colors white and red. Later sold to Fred Fetterman and rebuilt. (Photo — Charles G. Mandrake)

and NC 23V of Standard Oil of New Jersey.

It is interesting to note the company pilots and their accumulated flying hours for 1932:⁴

E. E. Aldrin — 1000
 R. L. Brookings — 952
 R. E. Ellis — 756
 W. W. White — 690
 R. C. Oertel — 596
 Harry Howze — 448

The duties of the company airplanes, as defined in 1932 were:

Product testing — as flying “test cars” these airplanes proved out new aviation products.

Maintenance of sales contracts — follow through by aviation sales representatives on current and repeat business.

Following air meets — “showing the flag.”

Executive transportation.

Mapping of producing areas — mainly South American assignments, airplanes fitted with aerial cameras.

Hauling of oil field equipment.

Distribution of company payrolls in South America remote districts.

When the Standard Oil Co. of Louisiana set up its aviation department in 1928, their operational policy was similar to that of the New Jersey company. Air meets were followed, ground directional markers were installed on building roofs, and refueling facilities built at all major airports in the south. In March 1930 Lt. Col. John H. Jouett, former commander of Fort Crockett, Galveston,

Texas, was appointed manager of SOLA's aviation department. Col. Jouett's aviation qualifications were unique; he was one of the few Army men to hold four aviation ratings simultaneously; aircraft pilot, airship pilot, aircraft observer and balloon observer. In 1932 he took a leave of absence, on invitation from the Chinese Government, to organize a permanent aviation school and air force, not an easy task. Jouett had to first train a group of instructors who, in turn, passed on his instructions to students whom had never seen any aircraft before. Three years later the new Chinese Air Force had some 200 pilots all trained under Jouett's system along with an equal number of fairly modern airplanes. For his services to the Republic of China, the Nanking government under General Chiang Kai-Shek, presented him with the decoration of Commander of the Order of the Jade, the only foreigner to be so honored. Col. Jouett later retired to his home in the Virgin Islands where he died last fall.⁷

REFERENCES:

1. Ellis, Frank H. *Canada's Flying Heritage*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961. 2nd Edition.
2. *The Lamp*. House organ of Standard Oil Co. of New Jersey. Feb., June and August 1921.
3. Now Col. E. E. Aldrin, USAF (Ret) and consultant for the Society's "Project Oilwings," also father of Col. "Buzz" Aldrin, astronaut of Apollo 11.
4. *The Lamp*.
5. Will W. "Chuck" White, Maj. Gen. USAF (Ret)
6. Harry Howze was Humble Oil Company's first pilot.
7. Newsletter-AAHS, No. 9, February 1969, p. 8.

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Lockheed Vega, C/n 118, NC 106N, engine from NC 7440 installed. (Photo — Stephen Hudek Collection)