

EVEREADY TO THE RESCUE

TRAPPED BY A SNOWSTORM, A FLIGHT OF RCAF FAIRCHILD TRAINERS
FINDS SAFETY THANKS TO A QUICK-THINKING TEENAGER

BY RANDALL SMITH



"Hi, Russ. How was school today?" Russell Price asked of his son Russell Jr. as he attempted to slam the front door shut against a roaring winter blast that pushed not only freezing air but a flurry of snow into the Prices' bungalow in Utica, New York. The elder Price was working at a foundry in the upstate town, producing items of warfare but he was worried about the cut-backs caused by Japan's unconditional surrender. It seemed that all across town men of his age were being let go as the government cancelled contracts. He was concerned but he did not want to let Russ Jr. nor his wife Mary realize his thoughts. His job at the foundry paid well and he knew it would be

hard to find something equal. At the same time, deep down inside, he was glad the war was over. His brother John was still listed as "Missing In Action" — his B-29 Superfortress, on which he was a gunner, disappeared during one of the last bombing missions of the war. Russell felt the loss of his younger brother deeply but rarely expressed his feelings. However, he was very glad the war was done and over with since that meant Russell Jr. would not be called up — he was in high school and, at age 16, preparing to become a senior.

There was one problem — a big one as far as Russell was concerned. His son was completely obsessed with aviation and Russell had just brought home the monthly pile of aviation magazines from

work. The young man would grab the copies and then proceed to study them for hours on end — often neglecting his homework. For technical material, he would go through *Aero Digest* while *Flying* would provide details on the latest in general aviation activities. Then, there were all the "pulp" magazines that he saved over the years that provided plenty of WWI and WWII reading excitement.

Russ Jr. wanted to become a military pilot but he realized his father's objections. The previous fall, he had saved money from his paper route to pedal over to Utica Municipal Airport where his collection of coins bought him two "introductory" flights in a Taylorcraft. It was the first time

he had been in an aircraft and he was thrilled. However, getting the money to continue future lessons while keeping it all hidden from his family, would be a major problem.

General aviation flying had resumed with the end of the war and it did not take long before surplus ex-military aircraft began filling the grass tie-down areas. The field had opened in 1928 and was typical of the time period following Lindbergh's flight as America tried to become "air-minded." There were several sod runways with the longest being a bit over 3000 feet and, as he went aloft for that first time, Russ Jr. was thrilled to see the word "UTICA" painted in large letters atop the main brick hangar.

That late January 1946 day had flying in unheated light aircraft just about as far from anyone's mind as possible. Bad weather had been hammering upstate New York for days with just brief busts of sunlight. Listening to their RCA set that evening, Russ Jr. and his family sat near the log fire in their small but cozy living room when Russ heard a sound he immediately identified, but how

could it be since it was now nearly dark and snow was coming down in an off and on pattern?

The sound was aircraft engines — several of them. Russ Jr. knew the noise was not coming from large military aircraft but smaller planes — perhaps surplus training machines but why would they be flying in the dark and in snow? Grabbing a heavy jacket and his Eveready flashlight, Russ Jr. ran out into the freezing yard. His father quickly followed.

Their house was surrounded by fairly tall trees



Sixteen-year-old Russell Price Jr. used his faithful surplus Eveready paratrooper flashlight to help guide down the lost ex-Royal Canadian Air Force PT-26s.



Hundreds of surplus Cornells were returned to the USA after service with the Royal Canadian Air Force. The ferry pilot of FH980 (would become NC68359) appears to be attempting to pin the Fairchild on the runway numbers at Buchanan Field in Concord, California. This great William T. Larkins shot illustrates how the planes were being returned to various disposal centers where they would be placed for sale. (W.T. Larkins)

The morning sun captures four of the five Cornells that came down in a field near Utica, New York, during January 1946.