



Two more views of J7759 (left) and J7758 (above) at Edmonton. In the photo at left, a light-coloured “engine tent” is installed around the Jaguar’s cylinder banks. It appears to be a custom for this aircraft type. A heating unit would be attached to the intake in the lower portion of the tent for warming the engine prior to starting it.

Flying Officer Dickins Assesses the Siskin

It was Dickins who prepared an extensive (16 closely-typed pages) report on the tests and submitted it to HQ on 21 March. It contains an enormous quantity of information concerning every portion of the trials, including detailed information on Siskin airframe and undercarriage structures, engine starting and operation, fuel, lubricants, priming, and all aspects of cold weather operation and maintenance. The scope of this article prohibits even a highly compressed summary of this portion of the report.

Of particular interest is Dickins’ examination of the human aspects of this investigation. He considered the Siskin, with its poorly designed cockpit and drafty construction with inefficient fabric lacing and useless windscreen, as “extremely unsatisfactory.” He concluded: “There is a limit to the amount of clothing that a person can wear and still be able to operate the aircraft properly, unhampered and unrestricted.”

As well as clothing and other forms of personal protection, he commented, in detail, on the physical and mental personal effects of flying and aircraft maintenance in extremely

cold conditions. He remarked that: “It requires a tremendous amount of vitality and energy to combat the inevitable chill and frostbite.” After additional comments and recommendations, he concluded this section of the report by stating: “I suffered from frozen hands, feet, and face but managed to avoid any chills, which I attribute to extra vitality.” He may well have been right.

This report is of interest to the researcher and historian, not solely because of its informational content but because of its unique point of view. The winter trials of the other three types undertaken before the Second World War – the Westland Wapiti, Hawker Audax, and Hawker Perseus Hart – were conducted comprehensively and professionally and resulted in detailed reports. However, they concentrated exclusively on the subject aircraft and its operation under winter conditions. With the Siskins, however, while the trials were conducted equally professionally, one gets the impression that, to some degree, the operation of modern aircraft under winter conditions was the

focus, using the Siskin as a test vehicle. That is not to say there was not a great deal of type-specific research, but, at times, the other predominated. This may well be summed up by the concluding paragraph of Dickins’ report.

From the experience gained, I am convinced that winter operations in Canada do not require any more equipment and personnel than similar operations in summer and that with the right type of aircraft and engines will be just as reliable and comfortable.

It is a nearfetched assumption that Punch Dickins’ time with the Siskins had a definite influence on his subsequent career and, hence, on Canadian aviation.



In his report, F/O Dickins mentioned that the camera supplied for recording the flights and other details was incapable of a good focus. These photos, copied from the relevant file, appear to indicate that this was so. However, it should be noted that they hint at the possibility that there may have been other photo equipment (darkroom) and supplies (film or plates, and or print materials) problems as well.