

Portrait :

WILLIAM LEVACHER

From ÉNA to Buffalo Airways

By Pierre Gillard, translation by Kenneth I. Swartz

"I was interested in aviation from a very young age. I couldn't specify a particular date, but, since I became aware, I can say that I have always had a strong interest," says William Levacher, a pilot for Buffalo Airways since late September 2019.

This company based in Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories is well known in the aviation world for operating such iconic aircraft such as the Curtiss C-46 Commando, the Canadair CL-215 and

the famous Douglas DC-3. So how can a 22-year-old Quebecer end up as a pilot of vintage airplanes, some of which are three times his age?

In the beginning, William chose to study avionics at the École nationale d'aérotechnique (ÉNA) in Saint-Hubert, Quebec. Then in February 2016, he began his private pilot training. No one in his family was an aviator, so his intention to start flying was more of a passion, he says. With his private pilot's license



in hand, he accumulated flight hours on a Cessna 172 at the ÉNA flying club. Looking back, he says, "avionics was a good way to understand all of the onboard systems on an aircraft; I also wanted to have another career path, because until recently I never imagined finding a job as a pilot so quickly."

The link with Buffalo Airways came with the "Plane Savers" challenge which saw reassembly - in just two months - of a Douglas DC-3 (registered C-FDTD) abandoned for more than 25 years at the Saint-Hubert airport so that it could fly on the 75th anniversary of the D-Day Normandy landing on June 6, 2019 in which this plane participated. This aircraft was acquired for the occasion by Mikey McBryan, son of the legendary Joe McBryan, founder of Buffalo Airways. William tells us how he came to participate in this project supported by ÉNA: "I had been following the series on YouTube since January and, subsequently, with Guillaume Bras and Jérémy Savoie, two



William at the controls of the Curtiss C-46 Commando over the inhospitable regions of the Northwest Territories. As this aircraft has no autopilot, the pilot's full attention is required throughout the flight (Pierre Gillard).

other avionics students, we decided to volunteer. Frédéric Morin, a professor in the Department of Avionics at ÉNA, introduced us to the project and the first work we did being the repair of an overhead panel for the generators. After that, I didn't give up until the DC-3 left for Thunder Bay. I joined because I was just interested in doing something in my spare time and seeing this famous DC-3 up close. "

During the summer of 2019, William was completing his training as a commercial IFR and multi-engine pilot. In the process, he was hired by Buffalo Airways in Yellowknife. At the end of October, he completed his PPC (Pilot Proficiency Check) on the Beechcraft King Air A100 and began his training on the famous Curtiss C-46 Commando, of which only four examples still fly in the world. At the end of December, he obtained his PPC on large twin-engine aircraft, but the progression did not stop there, because he immediately began flying on the company's Lockheed L.188 Electra four-engine aircraft on which he qualified in March 2020. His rapid progression is exceptional and probably unique in the world.

Speaking about his job at Buffalo Airways, William says: "I think what attracts me to these kinds of operations is the fact that we have to do pretty much everything and you don't get bored from the moment we wake up until we go to bed! In addition, the environment in which we fly is filled with spectac-

ular landscapes and different routes, each with their own particularities. What I really like is being able to fly planes that are operated according to CARs 705 rules in hoodie rather than with a nice clean shirt! "

"Right now I don't really have a plan - I'm going day-by-day," he says of his future. "I really enjoy what I do and have the chance to fly a variety of machines from the small King Air to the large L.188. I would say my next goal would be to go get my ATPL and continue with this kind of operation. "

His message to young people who might be interested in a

career in aviation is: "My advice is quite simple: just don't think too much and say 'yes' when you receive offers or opportunities, because if you wait or think too much, the opportunity will no longer be there ".

As of this writing, William has accumulated over 700 flight hours, including approximately 500 hours with Buffalo Airways. In the meantime, in addition to the three aircraft mentioned above, he also gained some flying experience on the Canadair CL215 water bombers and the famous Douglas DC-3.



William participated in the reassembly of a wing of the Douglas DC-3 C-FDTD at Saint-Hubert airport in May 2019. Easily identifiable with his tuque, he quickly became one of the key characters in the "Plane Savers" series on YouTube (Pierre Gillard).