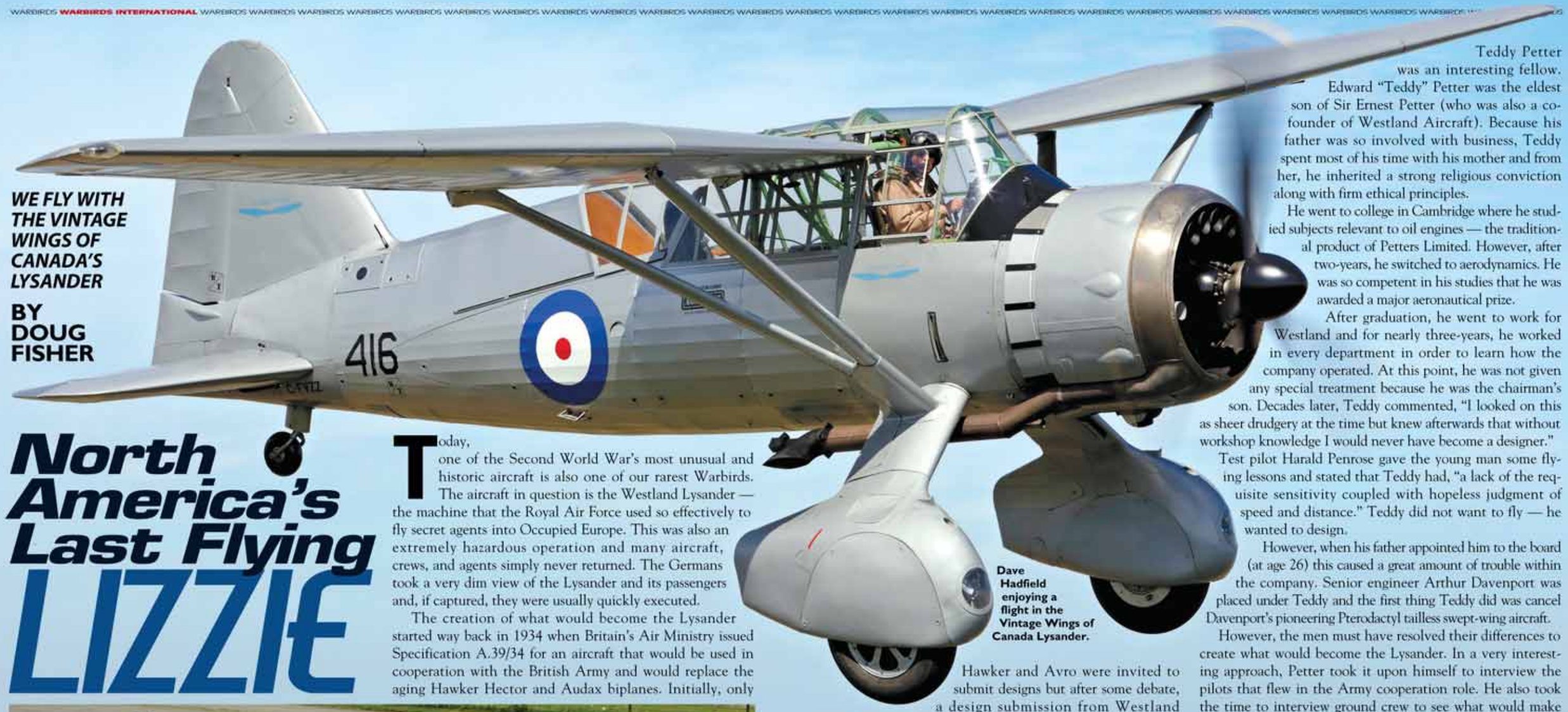

WE FLY WITH THE VINTAGE WINGS OF CANADA'S LYSANDER

BY DOUG FISHER

North America's Last Flying LIZZIE

Today, one of the Second World War's most unusual and historic aircraft is also one of our rarest Warbirds. The aircraft in question is the Westland Lysander — the machine that the Royal Air Force used so effectively to fly secret agents into Occupied Europe. This was also an extremely hazardous operation and many aircraft, crews, and agents simply never returned. The Germans took a very dim view of the Lysander and its passengers and, if captured, they were usually quickly executed.

The creation of what would become the Lysander started way back in 1934 when Britain's Air Ministry issued Specification A.39/34 for an aircraft that would be used in cooperation with the British Army and would replace the aging Hawker Hector and Audax biplanes. Initially, only Hawker and Avro were invited to submit designs but after some debate, a design submission from Westland Aircraft Limited, in Yeovil, Somerset, was also invited.

Dave Hadfield enjoying a flight in the Vintage Wings of Canada Lysander.

The Westland design, designated P.8, was the work of Arthur Davenport under the direction of Teddy Petter. P.8 was Petter's second aircraft design.

Teddy Petter was an interesting fellow. Edward "Teddy" Petter was the eldest son of Sir Ernest Petter (who was also a co-founder of Westland Aircraft). Because his father was so involved with business, Teddy spent most of his time with his mother and from her, he inherited a strong religious conviction along with firm ethical principles.

He went to college in Cambridge where he studied subjects relevant to oil engines — the traditional product of Petters Limited. However, after two-years, he switched to aerodynamics. He was so competent in his studies that he was awarded a major aeronautical prize.

After graduation, he went to work for Westland and for nearly three-years, he worked in every department in order to learn how the company operated. At this point, he was not given any special treatment because he was the chairman's son. Decades later, Teddy commented, "I looked on this as sheer drudgery at the time but knew afterwards that without workshop knowledge I would never have become a designer."

Test pilot Harald Penrose gave the young man some flying lessons and stated that Teddy had, "a lack of the requisite sensitivity coupled with hopeless judgment of speed and distance." Teddy did not want to fly — he wanted to design.

However, when his father appointed him to the board (at age 26) this caused a great amount of trouble within the company. Senior engineer Arthur Davenport was placed under Teddy and the first thing Teddy did was cancel Davenport's pioneering Pterodactyl tailless swept-wing aircraft.

However, the men must have resolved their differences to create what would become the Lysander. In a very interesting approach, Petter took it upon himself to interview the pilots that flew in the Army cooperation role. He also took the time to interview ground crew to see what would make their lives easier when it came to maintenance in the field. With this information, he placed importance on pilot visibility, ability to safely takeoff and land in small areas, and ease of ground maintenance.

This ground view shows the Lysander's unusual wing to advantage as well as the low-mounted horizontal tail.

This is how it all started — a magnificent view of the prototype Lysander as Harald Penrose climbs high above a cloud deck and heads to the camera plane. From a frontal view, the Lysander was a fairly streamlined aircraft.