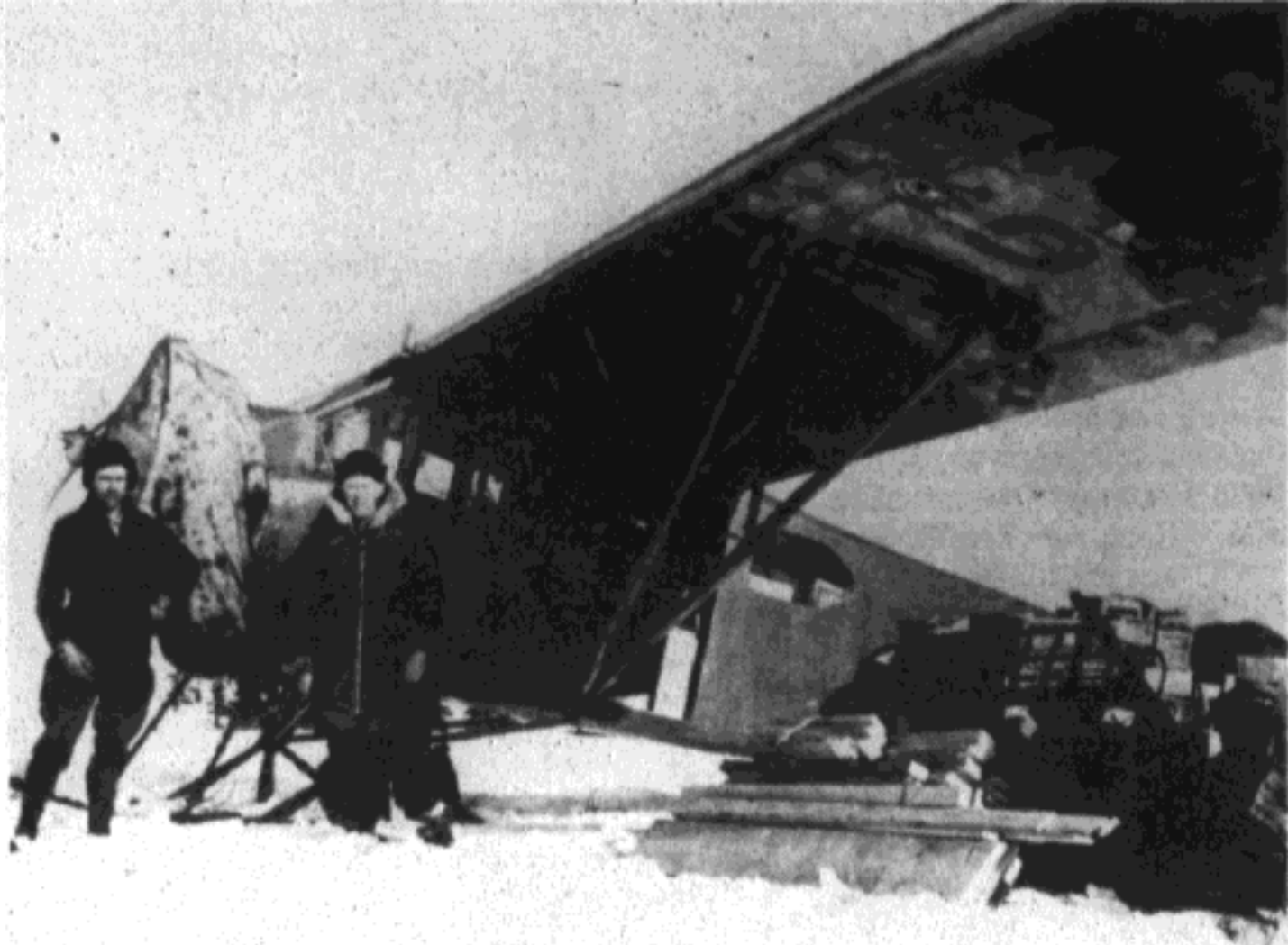




"The Personal Service," is the only caption we have for this vintage photograph. From the clothing and aircraft styles one comes to the conclusion that this event took place in the early 1920's.



A 1938 freight haul to Big Squaw Lake in the Chandalar gold mining area. Here Winn Wurtz, left, and pilot Noel Wien are shown with the Fairchild "71." These aircraft saw many years of company service.

Veteran Alaskan Bush Flier Noel Wien Passes Away

He left his mark in Alaskan Skies and Alaskan hearts

An adventurer and friend to many rural Alaskans has come North for the last time. The body of pioneer bush pilot Noel Wien was laid to rest in Fairbanks Sunday, almost a week after he passed away in his Bellevue, Wash.,

Wien, who was 78, first came to Alaska in 1924 and soon became a trailblazer in the Alaskan skies. When he arrived by boat in Seward, his luggage included two dismantled airplanes in crates and a flying certificate signed by Orville Wright, first solo pilot of a propeller-driven airplane.

The flying exploits of the Wien brothers, Noel, Sig, and Ralph eventually led to the creation of Wien Air Alaska, the airline that pioneered jet service to the villages of rural Alaska.

Wien Air Alaska pilot Capt. Thomas Richards, Sr., himself a former bush pilot, remembers Wien as a kind and sensitive man. He told the Tundra Times that when Wien, who remained a director of the airline until his death, came to Anchorage for the last time to meet with other directors, he was forced to pass the picket lines maintained by striking Wien pilots Richards said, "He told the pilots to hang in there."

Born in 1899 in Wisconsin, Wien was raised on a farm in Minnesota. He made his first solo flight at Minneapolis when he was 22. A short three years later, he made the first flight ever between Anchorage and Fairbanks. Time: 3 hours, 45 minutes, via the Alaska Railroad tracks.

The same year, Wien made the first flight over, and landing above, the Arctic Circle. In 1925, he made the first commercial flight between Fairbanks and Nome.

And that's not all,

1929 - Wien makes the first flight between North America and Asia. In effect, Wien retraced the steps of Alaska's Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts over the Bering Strait

In the photograph at the right are three of Alaskan aviation's famous Wien brothers. Noel is on the left, flanked by Fritz and Sigurd.

Stuck in the mud at breakup in May, 1925. Noel Wien made the first landing on the first privately built landing field in Alaska a little too early for the soft ground, at Circle Hot Springs. Builder Frank Leach and his team of horses helped extricate the three-place open cockpit Hisso Standard J-1.



Noel Wien in 1974.

between Nome and East Cape, Siberia, Asia's forbidding backdoor.

1935 - Wien makes the first commercial flight between Fairbanks and Seattle, heralding the addition of air transportation to Alaska's commercial lifeline to the Lower 48 states.

Wien and his brother Ralph founded Wien Airways in 1927. Wien retired as president of the company in 1965, three years before the company merged with Northern Consolidated Airlines.

But that's recent history. Glance at these old photos and try to imagine the bush, or even the "urban" Alaska, that Noel Wien found beckoning to him more than fifty years ago.

