



NEWS AND COMMENT

PLYMOCOUPE CLARIFICATIONS

I'd like to add my two cents to the "Plymcoupe" story (JOURNAL, Vol 11, No 2) and perhaps clear up some misinformation.

In 1933, Olaf Fahlin and Swen Swanson, designer of the Arrow 5, Arrow Sport and Lincoln Sport, to name a few, put their heads together and dreamed up a very neat little cabin two-seater called the SF-1. It was designed around an 85 hp Pobjoy "R" of British manufacture and closely resembled Swanson's earlier cabin efforts, the Kari-Keen Coupe and Swanson W-15 Coupe. Ole was manufacturing the Fahlin propellers at the Nicholas-Beazley plant and that's how Russell B. "Penny" Nicholas became involved. N-B rented shop space and supplied the construction materials for a price.

In April 1934, Ole tested the SF-1 and it flew beautifully the first time up. No adjustments of any sort were required and it flew unchanged for about three years. Eventually an 85 hp Continental was installed, but performance suffered. The SF-1 disappeared during the war after being stored in an abandoned hangar.

Soon after the SF-1's debut, Eugene Vidal, then director of the Bureau of Air Commerce, initiated a design competition for a safe, cheap, two-seater personal plane and trainer. There were about fourteen entries, the winner being the Stearman-Hammond pusher. Although the high cost of aircraft engines defeated the "poor man's plane" concept, the competition did stimulate a lot of interest and resulted in a number of auto engine conversions, such as the Arrow F Sport, the Funk and the Plymcoupe.

In the summer of 1934, Fahlin and Swanson pulled the engine out of a brand new Plymouth sedan, installed an aluminum head, welded manifold and reduction gear. The complete unit, including water in the radiator, weighed 502 lbs. It developed 82 hp at 1550 RPM (prop speed) for takeoff and was not inverted, as the photos clearly show. Walt Chrysler was interested and conducted 100 hour tests for certification.

The SF-2 Plymcoupe was nearly finished when Swanson died suddenly of pneumonia in February 1935. Fahlin finished the project and initial testing commenced in April. At this time Vidal announced that a contract had been let to the Fahlin Manufacturing Company for the SF-2 Plymcoupe (presumably for the delivery of a single

aircraft). Although the aircraft was evaluated by the CAA (note Department of Commerce registration, NS-65), it remained Fahlin's property until he sold it in the spring of 1936.

The Plymcoupe was fitted with extra fuel tanks, permitting an endurance of twenty-two hours, and shipped to Alaska for a projected non-stop flight from Anchorage to Spokane. A few hours after takeoff the pilot encountered fog and soon ran out of sky. He came down near a small fishing village and rolled the Plymcoupe up in a ball, as Ole puts it. So far as he knows, it's still there.

The SF-2, like the SF-1, handled extremely well, and its performance was quite satisfactory, despite the engine weight penalty. Except for the initial takeoff, it outperformed a Porterfield of the same horsepower. Nicholas-Beazley put out some publicity at the time, and undoubtedly would have been the logical one to exploit the design commercially. However, no attempt was made to go into production and only the one Plymcoupe was ever built.

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ADDITIONAL ACES IN A DAY

Two pilots were omitted from my "Army Air Force Aces in a Day" article which appeared in the JOURNAL, Vol 11, No 2, and I would like to take this opportunity to give them their due recognition.

Captain Ernest E. Bankey, Jr. of the 364th Fighter Group, 8th Air Force, is credited with the destruction of four FW 190s and one and one-half Messerschmitt 109s on 27 December 1944 while flying in the vicinity of Bonn, Germany.

Lt William H. Allen is credited with five twin-engined trainers on 5 September 1944, while flying with the 343rd Fighter Squadron of the 55th Fighter Group, 8th Air Force. His flight of four aircraft shot down 16 of these aircraft in less than five minutes. William N. Hess, 9641 Kingston Rd, Shreveport, La.

ANOTHER ACE IN A DAY?

I read with great interest the feature in the Summer JOURNAL, "Army Air Force Aces in a Day." Author Hess has done a fine job, but I fear he has overlooked one of our "five in a day" aces. Assuming that lack of prior victories was not a criteria in earning a place on the list, I would like to call attention to my friend, Lt Col Robert E. Woody who was credited with the destruction of five Me 109s on one mission over Germany while a member of the 354th Fighter Squadron, 355th Fighter Group. I contacted Bob Woody again after reading the JOURNAL article, and these are the facts of that engagement as he recalled them to me:

On 24 April 1944 Captain Woody was leading a flight of four P-51Bs, escorting the main stream of B-17s attacking targets near Munich. Enemy air activity near the bombers was nil so Woody began switching radio channels listening for signs of air action. The fighter/bomber channel proved to be quite active and indications were heard of a large fight developing. In the confusion of the radio chatter, Capt. Woody was able to distinguish the word "Alps" intermingled with calls for assist-



Fahlin SF-1 built in 1934 and powered by 85 hp Pobjoy "R" radial. Registration X271Y. (John Underwood)

ance. Turning his flight in the direction of the mountains, he began searching the skies over the Alps. Spotting a large fight in the distance, he and his flight released their drop tanks and made toward the battle. In his anxiety to get into action, Capt. Woody, without realizing it, began advancing his throttle and soon outdistanced his flight. Suddenly, a flight of Me 109s crossed his path in a shallow dive, passing above him and crossing from the five o'clock position to eleven o'clock as they descended. These enemy aircraft were heading for the same large fight and did not see Woody's P-51 as he swung in and dove at them from behind.

Starting with the rear Messerschmitt, Capt. Woody picked off three of the enemy before they became aware of his presence and broke formation. The fourth plane was hit and went down on the break. The German flight leader dove away and was lost to sight. The distance from the main fight had been closed during the destruction of the first four aircraft, and numerous other planes were in the immediate vicinity when Capt. Woody latched on to the tail of a 109 which he believed to be the aircraft which had dived away from him. This enemy pilot proved to be very proficient, and the chase became more difficult as the Messerschmitt headed for tree top altitudes. The German attempted to brush off Woody's P-51 on snow-covered hillsides, and at one point the Mustang ducked under high tension wires. Finally, the 109 flew into the P-51's sights and was destroyed. The rest of Capt. Woody's flight scored well as they joined the main fight, and a total of nine enemy aircraft were credited, including the five by Capt. Woody. For his performance that day Capt. Woody was awarded the DSC by General Spaatz. When the war ended, Capt. Woody was credited with a total of 11 victories--seven in the air and four on the ground.

About four years ago I produced a drawing of Lt Col Woody's P-51B for him and based it on photographs which he loaned me. This particular P-51B was equipped with the Malcolm Hood and carried the white identification stripes on wings and vertical/horizontal tail surfaces in the manner standardized by fighter groups in Europe. Code letters were WR-A, and they also were painted in white. Standard olive drab finish was applied and rubbed to a semi-gloss. At the time of the Munich mission, there were four small black crosses edged in white painted on the left cowlings under the windscreen. Col Woody and I would be pleased if any reader could produce the serial number for his P-51 as none of the available photographs show same.

Maj. Eugene E. Risedorph, P.O. Box 291, Grand Prairie, Tex.

N A C A NORTH AMERICAN MUSTANGS

I was interested in seeing the PA ANG P-51D on page 144 of the Summer 1966 JOURNAL, submitted by Member H. Smeltzer. This aircraft is one of nine Mustangs which

are known to have been attached to the NACA at various times, and, although the uses to which they were put are not entirely clear, it is suspected they were tested as to their suitability for aircraft carrier operations.

The nine aircraft are:

- 1) P-51D-5-NA, serial 44-14017, NACA No. 102. This aircraft was tested on the USS Shangri-La and was fitted with arrestor gear. Test flown by LCDR R. M. Elder of VF-5.
- 2) P-51D-5-NA, serial 44-13257, NACA No. 108. This is a real oldie, a Model NA-109, and in fact the fifth production NA-109 which was the first of a very long line of D's. It had the modified fin/rudder and was flying as late as June 1959 as N4222A still sporting the "high" tail configuration.
- 3) P-51H-10-NA, serial 44-64703, NACA No. 110. No details available on this one.
- 4) P-51D-25-NT, serial 44-84864, NACA No. 126. Although this aircraft is listed as having been attached to the NACA, I rather think 44-84683 is the aircraft so attached, and the last digit of the serial was inadvertently altered somewhere along the way. P-51D 44-84863 became N4223A and was still flying in the early 1960s. It also has the high tail configuration.
- 5) P-51D-25-NT, serial 44-84900, NACA No. 127. This is the plane spotted by Mr. Smeltzer. Below are two views of it. This airplane is reported to have been used for carrier trials by the NACA and of course carries the tail alteration. Whether or not it flew with the PA ANG is open to question, although the stenciling under the cockpit reads "Air National Guard ETF-51D-25-NA" and the markings would seem to confirm that it did operate with the ANG.
- 6) P-51D-25-NT, serial 44-84944, NACA No. 128. No details available.
- 7) P-51D-25-NT, serial 44-84953, NACA No. 129. No details available.
- 8) P-51H-5-NA, serial 44-64415, NACA No. 130. Used by the NACA as late as 1958, carried the word TEST in large letters beneath the cockpit. No AAF serial carried, but simply "NACA-130" on the rear fuselage, ahead and below the stabilizer leading edge.
- 9) P-51D-25-NT, serial 44-84958, NACA No. 148. Fitted with the "High" tail modification. Carried the lone number "148" on both sides of the fin, where the standard AAF serial number would appear.

These are all the Mustangs I have recorded that were associated with the NACA. There are a great many questions unanswered about these airplanes, not the least of which is the apparent "H-ifying" of the tail assemblies on all of the D models. If any Member can fill in some of the history of any, or all, of these Mustangs, it would help clear up somewhat of a mystery.

Ken A. McLean, P-51/F-6 Specialist, 146 Lincoln Dr, Beaconsfield, Quebec, Canada.



North American P-51D-25-NT at Reading, Pa., June 1960.



Undated photo of same aircraft, serial number 44-84900.

CURTISS R2C COMMENTS

I would like to put forth a few "additional" comments on Thomas G. Foxworth's article on the Curtiss R2C racers in the JOURNAL, Vol 11, No 1. First, there are a few names not mentioned in the article of people involved, two of whom are still living. Dr Theodore F. Wright, who has had a fabulous career in aviation and who is now retired from several Cornell posts, was our Chief Engineer during the 1923 and later periods. Wm L. Gilmore (deceased) was above Ted and was probably of the Director of Engineering, if not V.P. Engineering class. However, Bill Gilmore was unquestionably the leader in many of the essential design features going into these airplanes--as well as the N.C. designs. Another man was William Wait who was Project Engineer on most, if not all, of these airplanes.

I also noted mention of S. Albert Reed's propellers (built by Curtiss, which had exclusive license from him). He was a retired Ph.D. and was addressed as "Doctor" by all. Ted Wright's Ph.D. was honorary and came much later, probably in the 1940s.

Regarding the name of the Garden City Company, as I write I have before me a print of the dedication of the plant taken in early 1918. Chiseled in stone, high and large, is the name "Curtiss Engineering Corporation." Now undoubtedly the parent company, with offices in Buffalo, was the "Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Co.", but the Garden City plant was an independent subsidiary.

On Page 8 of the article, in the first full paragraph, there is mention of "Curtiss-ply" of wood strips 90° to each other. Please note that on a conical fuselage you cannot hold a fixed angle. You may start with 90° at the center and work both ways, but the angle will of itself progressively change. The "tacked in strips" were actually riveted with copper tacks. These were initially driven thru the plywood and into the wooden form, then after removing the shell the protruding tacks were riveted over inside. The glue was casein.

Briefly, for myself, I joined the Curtiss Engineering Corp at Garden City on December 13, 1917 and except for several years of flying (also Curtiss-related companies) I was with them and successor companies until August 31, 1951. On the racers, my specialty was the layout and detailing of the entire tail section, plus surfaces, and the wing skin radiators, mostly under the watchful eye of Bill Wait.

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FOKKER F.32 CORRECTIONS

In regard to the Fokker F.32 article (in the JOURNAL Vol 11, No 2) I thought you might like to know that the bottom right photo on page 117 does not show Fokker's air yacht. The picture shows the passenger cabin mock-up of the Handley Page 42 Hannibal built for Imperial Airways. It shows the rear cabin. Between the fore and aft cabins were the galley to port and mail and baggage holds to starboard. The crew door, seen on the far bulkhead, was moved to starboard on the actual aircraft and set at about 45 degrees.

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FRENCH AIR VICTORY SCORING

The article by Mr. J. Cuny, "Hawk 75 in French Service", JOURNAL, Vol 11, No 1, was excellent and most interesting. It not only furnished information on an American-built aircraft flown during World War II but also gave a vivid picture of the operations of the French Air Force during those dark days of 1940.

However, there is an item that I feel needs to be added to the explanation of the French scoring system as described by Mr. Cuny in his footnotes. While confirmation of victories was most difficult under the

scoring regulations, pilots were credited with one whole victory even though they may have shared the destruction of the enemy aircraft with others. In other words if four pilots collaborated in the destruction of one plane, all four were credited with one official victory each. This credit system was a hold-over from the French scoring method of World War I, and as far as is known, France was the only country to so credit individual pilots in this manner. For example, Cdt Marin la Meslée's 15 confirmed victories as broken down from his citations would have been credited as 9.65 when broken into thirds, fourth and halves.

Victory credits for units would not be affected, for the unit was allowed only one victory for each enemy aircraft destroyed regardless of how many pilots collaborated. The score of the French Air Force is most commendable no matter how one looks at the scores of individuals, and I sincerely hope we will be reading more articles by this excellent historian.

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CURTISS FLEDGLING PLANS

Does anyone have accurate, well-detailed, 3-view drawings of the Curtiss Fledgling, or know where such plans are available? If so, please drop me a line and let me know. I recently had to measure up a restored, flying Curtiss Fledgling (an aircraft since shipped to the Brazilian government for probable use in a museum as an example of the first Brazilian air mail plane) in order to have a set of drawings for model work, as I have never seen any drawings of this plane. My drawings and details are quite accurate and satisfactory for my purposes, however, they cannot compare with factory drawings, if they exist at all. If I do not receive a response from this item, I shall assume that no one has drawings of the Fledgling, or knows factually where such drawings are available, and I shall proceed to make up a set of 3-views and details on the particular Fledgling which I measured for a future JOURNAL article. If you have Fledgling plans or know where they may be obtained, please drop me a line. Your note will be most appreciated and may save hours of work.

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PASSING OF AVIATION PERSONALITIES NOTED

Thanks to the help and interest of Members E. T. Smallwood, Royal D. Frey, Henri D'Estout, T. Gordon Sollman, Frank Strnad, Capt Neil M. Goen and Richard L. Seely the JOURNAL has received word of the passing of the following aviation personalities.

Maj. Gen. Caleb V. Haynes died at Carmel, Calif. on April 6, 1966 at the age of 71. General Haynes was a long-time heavy bomber pilot and commanded the American Air Task Force in India during WW II.

Andre Herbemont died in France on April 13, 1966 at the age of 76. He became research bureau head of Bleriot-Spad in 1919 and designed all Spad aircraft constructed from that time on.

George I. Myers died at Walnut Creek, Calif. on April 19, 1966 at the age of 74. He flew the mails in 1923 and joined what is today United Air Lines as an original pilot captain in 1927.

James G. Ray died in Washington, D.C. on May 15, 1966 at the age of 69. He organized Pitcairn Aviation, a predecessor of Eastern Airlines, and in the 1930s was general manager of All American Aviation, a predecessor of Allegheny Airlines.

Austin Ledyard Sands died in Newport, R. I. on May 30, 1966 at the age of 79. He taught flying in WW I, later set a new altitude record from Ellington Field, Texas, flying a plane to 24,000 feet without oxygen, and was an Executive Officer of the 356th Fighter Group during World War II.