

THE FLYING PIONEERS

By HAROLD E. MOREHOUSE

"The Flying Pioneers" was begun by Member Harold E. Morehouse in the JOURNAL, Volume 4, No. 2, (Summer, 1969) and has been presented each year since. The series represents many hours of research and correspondence with the Early United States aviators and their contemporaries, now running to fifty-six biographies.

LIONEL H. DeREAMER



Lionel H. DeReamer was born in Harrison, Michigan, February 21, 1889, the son of a professional musician. The family moved to Bay City, Michigan when Lionel was about one year old. He attended Bay City schools and later joined his father and older brother as a member of the DeReamer Orchestra.

DeReamer developed an early interest in aviation, and early in 1910 bought a single surface Curtiss-type biplane in known-down form from the Aeronautic Supply Co., of St. Louis, Missouri. He and a partner, George McBride, completed the plane and installed a two-cycle Pierce-Budd, locally built motor. With no flying training, DeReamer attempted to fly it when there was too much wind

and completely smashed it on his first try, but he was not injured. He was now determined to learn to fly, so he decided to take flying instruction and really get into the game. Accordingly, he went to St. Louis in the late Fall of 1911 and started taking instruction from George Beatty at Kinloch Field. However, in November, before DeReamer could complete his course, Beatty decided to pack up and move his equipment to Long Island for the winter months.

In the early spring of 1912, DeReamer resumed his flying instruction with Beatty at the Nassau Boulevard flying field on Long Island, New York, and made his first solo flight there about April 1, 1912. On April 19 he obtained Pilot License No. 115, flying a Beatty Wright. Meanwhile his father had formed an aviation company in Bay City, Michigan and purchased a second-hand Wright Model B plane. With this plane DeReamer started flying exhibitions immediately after obtaining his license, and that summer toured the Fairs in the Middle West. One of his more important dates, that season, was a one-week engagement at his own Michigan State Fair, starting September 20, where he was the star attraction. That Fall, he also did some testing of new Bleriot and Farman-type planes for the Brooks Boat Works of Saginaw, Michigan. He continued to fly exhibitions throughout the Fall season, and in November joined the Mills Aviators of Chicago, who engaged him to establish their southern school at Corpus Christi, Texas, for the winter months. There he flew his Wright on floats over the Gulf of Mexico, where, in addition to his school work, he carried passengers and frequently engaged in local exhibitions. This was the first flying from the water in the State of Texas. His arrangements there were under the auspices of the local Board of Trade. December 25 he flew over Corpus Christi and vicinity for thirty minutes. On Sundays, hundreds of persons visited the beach to watch his exhibitions. By mid-December, he had some students and daily school operations got under way. On December 31, he carried members of the Commercial Club of the city and newspapermen on flights over the beach.

On January 3, 1913, he carried Miss Buena Hill, the first woman in Texas to ride in a hydro-aero plane. Throughout January and February he made almost daily flights in his school and passenger work. On February 17, DeReamer made a notable 2 hour and forty minute flight about the bay, carrying J. C. Curran, of Saginaw, Michigan. At this time, he was doing a good passenger carrying business, some days making 12 - 15 flights, totaling four to five hours in the air. On March 12 he made the necessary official arrangements with the Postal Department to carry mail daily until March 30, from Corpus Christi to Port Aransas. On March 30 he lost one propeller on take-off, causing a slight accident; but he was unhurt. During the summer of 1913, he was again

flying exhibitions and in July was stationed in his home town of Bay City, Michigan.

In January, 1914 he was in Menominee, Michigan, flying off the ice of Breen Bay with a new Curtiss 8 cylinder engine in his plane. That Spring he formed the Northern Aviation Company at Wenona Beach, Bay City, Michigan. He built a hydro hangar there and started a school and passenger carrying venture, using his Wright Hydro. He flew actively there that summer, and on August 2, while flying from the beach to Bay City, his plane caught fire in the air. He was able to bring it down safely on the Saginaw River. After trying in vain to extinguish the fire, DeReamer was forced to swim ashore and watch the plane burn completely. He was unable to salvage any part of it, and this ended his flying as a pilot. He had been building a flying boat that summer, with a 6 cylinder, 100 hp Maximotor, but abandoned the project.

During World War I, DeReamer was a foreman with the Wilson Body Co. of Bay City, which was engaged in building parts for DeHaviland Planes. After giving up flying in 1914, he went back to music, playing with theatre orchestras in Bay City, Flint and Saginaw, Michigan until the early 1930's, when movies put an end to his career as a musician. DeReamer then became a musical director and program announcer for his local radio station, where he remained until his retirement in August, 1958. During his active days in the theatre, he met and played for many of the greatest stage actors and actresses of that era.

DeReamer, who during his later years continued to play with local musical groups at civic functions, passed away at Bay City on his birthday, February 21, 1962, at age 73. He was survived by his wife and one son. Burial was in Elm Lawn Cemetery, Bay City, Michigan. He was to have been honored with a special "Lionel DeReamer Day" at Wurtsmith Air Force Base, Oscoda, Michigan in April, on the 50th Anniversary of winning his pilot's license. Later, he was to be presented with his 50th year Early Bird plaque at Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.

Early Bird and Flying Pioneer Lionel DeReamer deserves great credit for the part he played in helping to create the aviation industry the world enjoys today. His name will long remain among those courageous young birdmen who made early American aviation history.

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