



Where Are They Now?

by Denham Scott

COLONEL ROSCOE TURNER

(Photo - Mrs. Carl Squier)

Now operating a business for sales, charter and repairs of aircraft, in Indianapolis, the legendary Roscoe Turner has a very solid claim to fame.

The late twenties and the early thirties were the exciting days of famous aviators and aviatrixes. New and spectacular records for speed, distance, altitude and endurance were being set and quickly toppled by an elite group of superb American pilots.

Daily fare in newspapers and the popular newsreels (i.e., Pathe News, before television) were such famous names as "Slim" Lindbergh, Art Goebel, Martin Jensen, Frank Hawks, Bernt Balchen, Jimmy Doolittle, Roscoe Turner, Wiley Post, Amelia Earhart, Ruth Nichols, etc. Their names were household words. Their relative merits and exploits were endlessly debated by young and old across the land.

Of them all, Roscoe Turner was by all odds the most colorful.

Demobilized after World War I, Mississippi-born Lt. Turner joined a circus as a lion tamer. Later he turned to barnstorming, as a wing walker, and parachutist, eventually drifting to Hollywood to become a fearless movie stunt man. He finally found his niche as an aviator. In 1929, he flew Lockheed Vegas for the Nevada Airlines.

A whimsical Governor bestowed the dubious title of "Colonel" of a non-existent Nevada Air Force on the imaginative Roscoe.

Tall, muscular and undeniably handsome, Roscoe proceeded to unashamedly exercise his unique talent for showmanship as a means to further his ambitions. He deliberately cultivated sartorial eloquence as the trade mark of Roscoe Turner. There being no law against it, the good "Colonel" was free to design his own uniforms.

His tailor fitted him out in a resplendent powder blue military tunic with a pair of golden wings embroidered on his chest, shoulders, and sleeves and hat; brass buttons; a shiny Sam Brown belt and elegant light beige riding breeches with a dashing wide flair.

This jaunty regalia was augmented with brilliantly polished leather knee-high military cavalry boots and a racy military peaked hat, a white silk scarf, leather helmet, goggles and a parachute. With his good looks, he sported a manly moustache which he kept carefully trimmed and waxed. He was truly something to behold. With his Southern gentleman manners and his swashbuckling appearance, he created a sensation wherever he went.

Once seen, Roscoe was never forgotten. He flew for Gilmore Oil in a plush chrome yellow Vega with red and gold trim including an ornate reproduction of the Gilmore trademark, a lion's head.

Roscoe flew all over the country, smashing intercity records as he went. He was accompanied by a docile playful pet lion named Gilmore.

Together they stayed in the finest hotels in the big cities where Roscoe always signed the register "Roscoe Turner and Gilmore." The hotels felt honored to host the famous pair. On land they traveled in a huge Packard open touring car, painted to match the Vega. Despite the magnificence and the dandyism, Roscoe was all man. A fearless and skillful pilot, he was destined to break more records and win more prize money than many. He became the only three-time winner of the famous but gruelling and dangerous Thompson Trophy Races. In 1933, for the first time in history, all three of Aviation's major awards, the Bendix, Harmon, and Thompson trophies, were in the custody of one man — the inimical and greatly loved — Roscoe Turner.