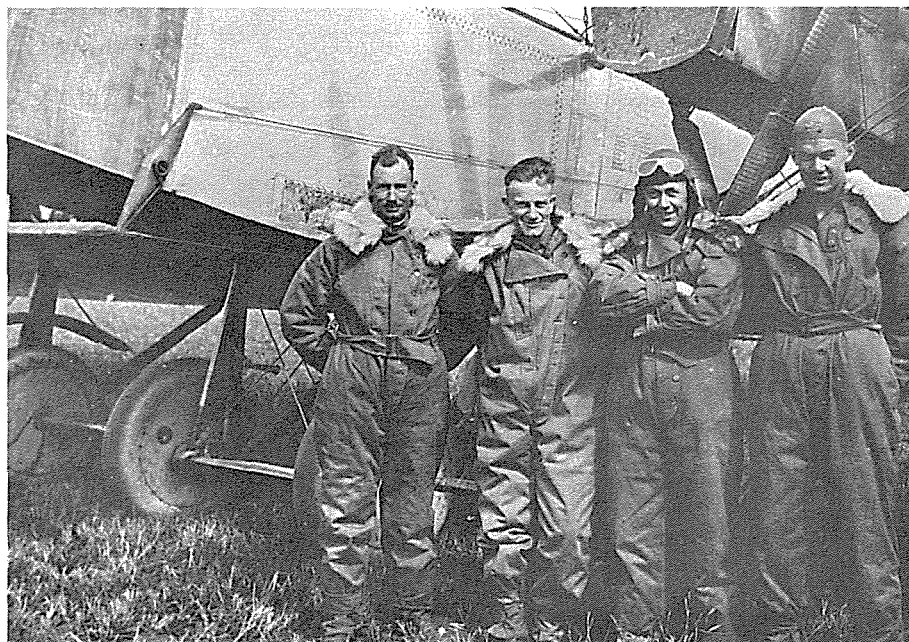


the odyssey of GMB no. 2

By MERLE C. OLMSTED



The GMB #2, repaired after its crash at Ausable Falls in July, was flown on to St. Paul, where Col. Hartz, Sgts. Dobias and Harding, and Lt. Harmon were photographed on 17 Sept. 1919. (Photo—courtesy of Jack Harding)

The 'Round America Flight was resumed on 29 August 1919 after the month-long pause for repairs in New York, and proceeded to Buffalo (another forced landing for the afternoon before reaching Buffalo) and then on to Milwaukee, where Lt. Latha Smith was relieved because of his injured ankle, and a week's rest while new tires were sent for and installed. Thereafter the flight progressed without undue mishaps, with but minor delays for repairs.

Except for a few long runs near the end of the flight, it was a lieisurely trip, the average distance flown each day was less than 200 miles, so there was plenty of time for maintenance, public relations activities, etc. Colonel Hartz handled the major portion of this aspect, for example, making speeches before the Rotary Club at St. Paul, and the Chamber of Commerce at Helena, Montana. No less than 49 short hops were made at 25 different cities along the route. All were to provide rides for civic leaders, newspaper men and photographers. Hartz had specific authorization to do this in his original orders.

Proceeding in this fashion the flight drifted into Montana and encountered its next forced landing near Missoula. There was no mechanical problem though, only the smoke of forest fires and a blizzard. Arrival at Ft. Lewis, Washington on the 6th of October ended the westward phase, the northern rim having been traversed. It had been nine weeks since departure from Bolling Field.

After a two day stopover at Ft. Lewis for maintenance on the aircraft and another speech, Harmon turned the bomber's nose south with Colonel Hartz in his usual position in the forward gunners pit, surveying the countryside as it unrolled beneath the nose. Hartz compiled extensive notes throughout the trip on possible landing grounds along the route and these were the major portion of his final report to the Chief of Air Service in December of 1919.

Between Portland and Medford, Oregon, the highest altitude of the trip was attained — 13,000 feet, close to the Martin's maximum altitude. The 12th through the 14th of October were spent at San Francisco awaiting the arrival of General Menoher for purposes now unknown.

Considerable time was spent at Rockwell Field with the

aircraft shuttling back and forth between Los Angeles and San Diego showing the public a real army bomber of a size few had seen before; they did not leave California until the 30th of October. Besides the usual news people and civic officials, movie stars Douglas Fairbanks and the ill-fated Fatty Arbuckle were both treated to rides.

On the 30th, GMB No. 2 departed to east, bound for El Paso, 857 miles away. This was the longest leg of the entire operation, and it crossed desolate lands, a long grind of over seven hours. However, the thunder of the Liberty's continued without a miss and they landed at El Paso with no problems.

The next day, the 31st of October, they took off bound for Love Field, Dallas, but one of the strangest occurrences of the flight caused an unscheduled landing a few minutes after takeoff.

No detailed account of the incident has been found in any of Hartz's reports, but among the papers relating to the flight, now in the National Archives, is the following telegram:

**"DIRECTOR OF THE AIR SERVICE
ATTENTION CHIEF OF TRAINING AND OPERATIONS, WASHINGTON. DELAYED IN FLIGHT OWING TO BAD WEATHER AND STOW-AWAY ON LANDING GEAR WHICH CAUSED US TO RETURN TO EL PASO AND SET HIM OFF. WILL PROCEED TO DALLAS TOMORROW IF RAIN STOPS THEN HOUSTON THEN BATON ROUGE.**

HARTZ"

The impending arrival of the big Martin had been well known in the El Paso area, and it was undoubtedly the largest airplane yet to be seen in West Texas. Because of this, a large crowd was on hand at Fort Bliss on Friday to see the departure.

The resident Air Service unit at Fort Bliss, the 11th Aero Squadron, handled the servicing of the Martin. Among the ground crew from the 11th was Pvt. Alvin Breeland, and for reasons now unknown, he ducked under the broad wings and found a seat on the landing gear spreader bar after the

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Douglas Fairbanks enjoyed flight with Harding and Harmon at Chapman Airport, Los Angeles, mid-Oct., 1919. Right, Ross Elkins, who helped rebuilt GMB #2 nose at Ausable Falls, and Harding at the 25th Anniversary of the 1924 'Round the World Flight. (Photos—Harding)

engines were started. The stowaway was not seen until the takeoff roll was begun, and then the crew did not understand the wild waving of the crowd. The bomber had traveled about 20 miles, roughly along the Rio Grande, before a DH-4 from Fort Bliss caught up with it, and by energetic hand signals, the pilot was able to indicate the presence of Pvt. Breeland perched on the landing gear.

Accounts vary at this point, some newspaper versions say the bomber landed near Fabens, Texas and transferred the unlisted passenger to the DH-4. Hartz's telegram indicates they turned back to Fort Bliss. In any case the adventurous Alvin returned to an almost certain "chewing out" by the 11th Squadron's 1st Sergeant! Breeland is said to have lived in Dallas and possibly he felt like going over the hill in style, or maybe it was just a desire to join a record breaking, and no doubt swashbuckling crew!

The remainder of the journey was by Ft. Worth, Dallas, New Orleans, Montgomery (a detour to the Aviation Repair Depot at Montgomery, now Maxwell AFB), Pinehurst, and Raleigh, NC. Enroute to Raleigh, they were again forced down by rain storms, but again with no damage, their sixth and last forced landing.

The grand adventure was nearly over. The next day, the 9th of November, Harmon flew 39056 the remaining 352 miles from Pinehurst to home base at Bolling Field, arriving at 1:30 P.M. having flown well over 10,000 miles. Jack Harding closed out that portion of his log book in these words; "Pinehurst to HOME, Washington, Bolling Field!" The *Odyssey of GMB #2* was over.

Colonel Hartz made numerous recommendations in his final report, in regards to the problems of cross country flying, obtaining and purchasing supplies, and technical changes to aircraft. He also strongly suggested mechanical training for all pilots, stating that; "It has been noticable throughout the trip that the average pilot is nothing more or less than an aerial chauffeur and when you take away his mechanic he is completely lost."

Although the GMB's performance was not spectacular, its servcibility during the flight had been exceptional for that period, due in part at least, to the care of Jerry Tobias

(Dobias) and Jack Harding. They had flown almost 10,000 miles in 114 hrs, 45 minutes. The latter figure included local flights, and in addition the engines had over 24 hours of warming time, giving a total engine running time of 139½ hours. The engine running time is of interest because the INSTRUCTIONS FOR INSTALLATION, INSPECTION AND MAINTENANCE on the Liberty 12 engine stated that after 50 hours running, the engine should be removed from the airframe and completely disassembled for thorough inspection.

The 'Round America Flight completed, the crew scattered. Colonel Hartz was relieved of command at Bolling Field late in the year. Like many other officers, Hartz reverted to his permanent rank of Captain after the War and its administrative problems settled. This may be partly the reason that, on the 24th of March, 1920, he resigned his commission and left the Army, lacking but three months of twenty years service.

Probably the strong reason for his resignation was his part in organizing the Aerial Transport Corp., an ambitious \$15,000,000 attempt to set up the first airline in the United States. Associated with it were other famous aviation names of the day including LCdr P.N. Bellinger, USN, who had been in command of the NC-3 on the Navy's Trans-Atlantic flight. According to news releases the corporation planned to have 500 aircraft in operation by the end of 1920, and 1500 within a year! Indeed an ambitious undertaking!

They soon found, however, that no where near this many suitable aircraft could be delivered by the American industry, and their attempt to obtain aircraft from abroad met with resistance from the Manufacturers Aircraft Assn. The dispute finally reaching the halls of congress where Senator New attempted to prevent the importation of aircraft for their purpose. His efforts were defeated, but Bellinger and Hartz demanded a full inquiry into accusations that they represented British interests. In any case, the Aerial Transportation Corporation's stupendous plans did not come to fruition.

Hartz later made the first aerial survey of the West Coast for air mail purposes, authored a book called *Airplane*

Mechanics Handbook, and became dean of Western College of Aeronautics. In later years he was district supervisor under the Civil Works Administration. He made his home in California after resignation from the Army and died there on 3 March 1941 at the age of 60.

"Smiling Jack" Harding transferred to McCook Field where he left the Service in January 1921 and became a civilian employee of the Air Service Engineering Division. He remained a close friend of "Tiny" Harmon and often flew with him and other famous army pilots of the era. The list of aircraft in which he flew as mechanic includes almost all of the types seen at McCook Field (except single seaters, of course). He participated in speed and ceiling tests of the Martin bombers being delivered to the Navy and logged many hours in the one and only Martin Transport. He became one of the top experts on the Liberty engine and thoroughly enjoyed life with the Air Service. Harding described his connections with the Martin bombers: "The happiest, most interesting, and enlightening experiences of my life were associated in some way in or in connection with, those twin engined machines." He believed that he probably had more flying time in the Martin GMB (MB-1) type aircraft than any other flyer and was also crew chief on the odd three-engined conversion of the GMB.

In 1923, Jack Harding applied for a commission in the Air Service Reserve, passed his tests and was accepted. In the same year Harding, a close friend of Erik Nelson, was selected to accompany him as mechanic and co-pilot of the NEW ORLEANS in the 1924 Around the World Flight, another remarkable achievement of the decade of the 1920s.*

He was called to active duty for the flight and was rated as a pilot for public relations reasons, though there is no record that he had any formal flight training. There is hardly any doubt however, that he was capable of flying

* Gen. Erik Nelson, USAF (Ret), passed away on May 9, 1970 at his home in Honolulu at age 81.

the big Douglas World Cruiser if the need should arise, or to give Nelson rest periods. It was his second participation in a history making flight, and the most important.

Harding was released from active duty in November 1924, promoted to Captain in the reserve, and he toured the country with Lowell Thomas giving lectures. In 1926 was briefly associated with Florida Airways, until a hurricane wiped out the equipment and the airline. For the next 13 years he held various positions with aviation firms and was U.S. representative for Pesco Pumps in England when World War II began. In 1942 he formed Harding Devices Co. of Dallas to build electric fuel valves of his own design, used by thousands in U.S. aircraft throughout the War. He remained head of his company until after 1960, when he moved to California.

"Smiling Jack" Harding, aircraft mechanic par excellence, died on May 26th, 1968 at his home in La Jolla, age 72. Among his honors were the Distinguished Service Medal, the Mackay Trophy (for the 1924 flight), the French Legion of Honor, and the Flying Cross, of Japan. He was a member of the Quiet Birdmen, and of the Order of Daedalians.

The currently living member of the original "Round the Rim Flight" crew of five men is Lotha A. Smith. He remained in the Army and Air Force, and is today retired Brigadier General, USAF.

The fate of Glenn Martin Bomber 39056, unfortunately, ends on an unknown note. The Aircraft Record Card has not been located, and no hint of the final disposition of the airplane has been found. The Smithsonian Institution records that it was to have received the machine, but if so it was never delivered. The last evidence, in March 1921, shows that it was apparently still based at Bolling Field, because at that time it was flown to McCook Field for repairs. As it does not show up in any of the available accident reports of the day, it was probably salvaged at some unknown time and place due to deterioration.

GMB #2 at Ft. Bliss, El Paso, on 30 October 1919, heads into the wind for warmup prior to takeoff.

(Photo—William D. Feeny)

