

RESEARCH PROJECT FALLOUT

THE AL KRAPISH SPECIAL

By MILTON SHEPPARD

While pursuing Research Project #6403, the Moth Aircraft Corp., a sidelight developed which deserves to be recorded. It was known that Alexander "Al" P. Krapish had been the chief test pilot of the Moth Co. while it was located at Lowell, Mass. in 1929. When the company was absorbed by the Curtiss-Wright Corp. and was moved to St. Louis in 1930, to be consolidated with the "Robin" plant, Al Krapish remained behind. And perhaps his relationship to #6403 would have ended there except for the loan of a rare photograph of the Krapish K-4 from AAHS member John C. Fulton. Since continued research has revealed very little else concerning Al Krapish it is hoped that this article will bring forth other facts from other members.

Recorded in the files of the Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission files is the issuance of Massachusetts Transport Permit No. A113, dated 14 June 1929 to Alexander P. Krapish.¹ His association with the Moth Co. was brief, spanning only 1929 and 1930. He not only test flew the Moths as they were produced, but was also a flying ambassador for the company, and gained attention for their performance by finishing in 20th place in the 1929 National Air Tour; and in the 1929 National Air Races he was 8th in the 510 cu. in. Event No. 9, and first in the Dead Stick Landing Contest.²

While testing a Moth, prior to its delivery to a customer, Al experienced an accident that was to scar his face for life. He was doing aerobatic maneuvers near Tewksbury, Mass. on 8 July 1929. As he rolled the airplane on its back the control stick came out of the socket. Al had to bail out and fast . . . with only 700 ft. altitude. He sustained a fractured skull, extending from his left eyebrow to his forehead in the form of a "Y" and creating a scar which he carried to his grave. He was so shaken up by the accident that he didn't fly again for many weeks and never fully recovered.³

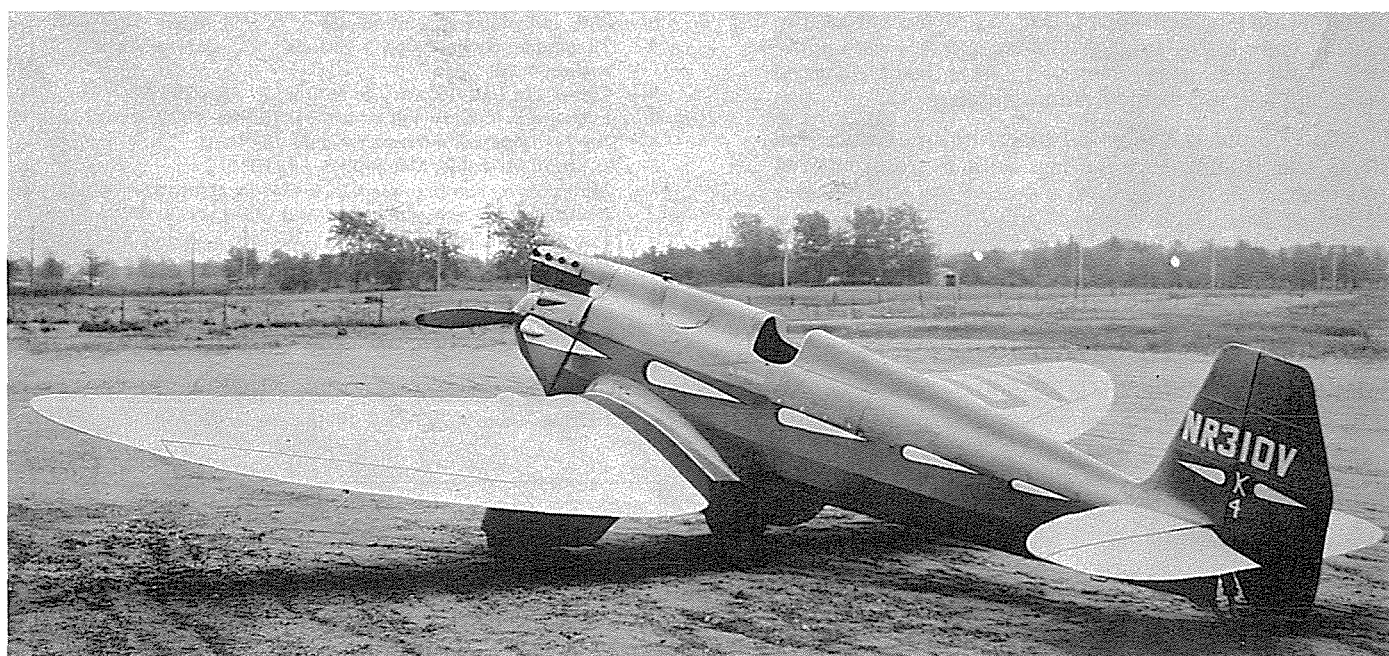
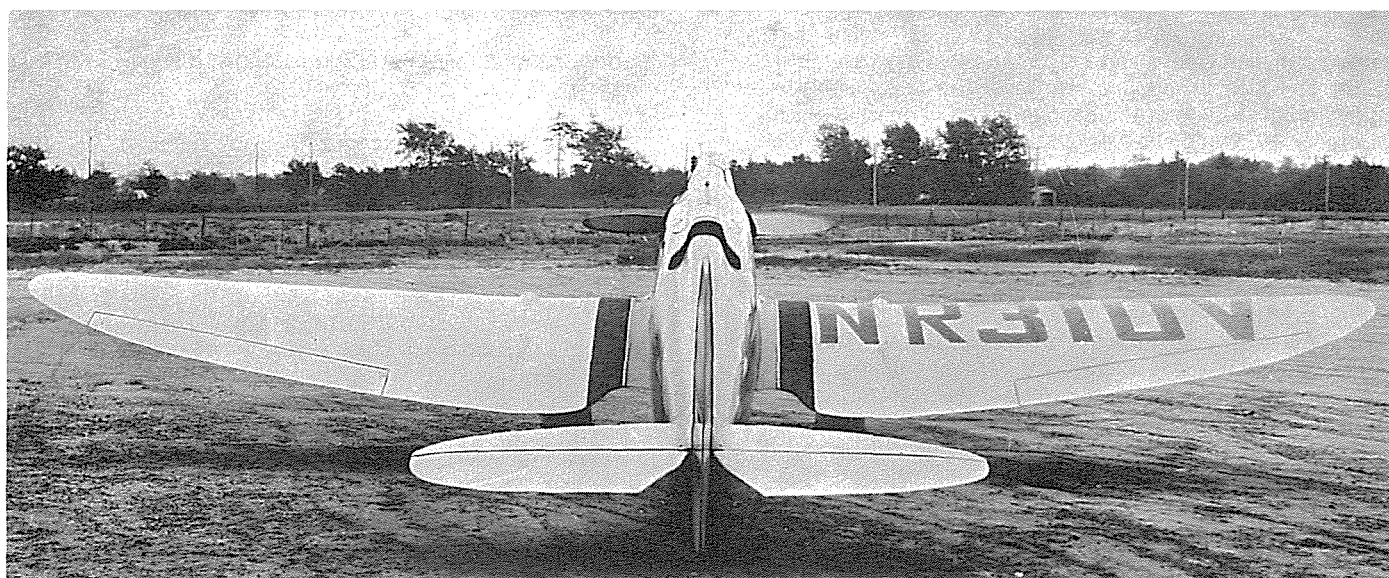
Al Krapish was born in Russia April 29, 1890. It is reported that he was a classmate of Dr. Igor Sikorsky and that Dr. Sikorsky was instrumental in the migration of the Krapish family to America in the early 1900's.⁴ Later Al Krapish was employed by the Sikorsky Aero Co. from 1923 through 1927.⁵ He left Sikorsky and worked as the chief test pilot for the Moth Aircraft Corp. during several months in 1929 and 1930. He was self-employed, as a test pilot, in Thompson, Conn. from 1930 until July 1941, at which time he returned to Vought-Sikorsky as a group leader in the Helicopter project. Sikorsky became a separate division of United Aircraft Corp. in 1943 and he remained in their employ until his death on March 27, 1951. At the time of his death, Mr. Krapish was a leadman in the Fabrication and Development of aircraft mock-ups.⁶

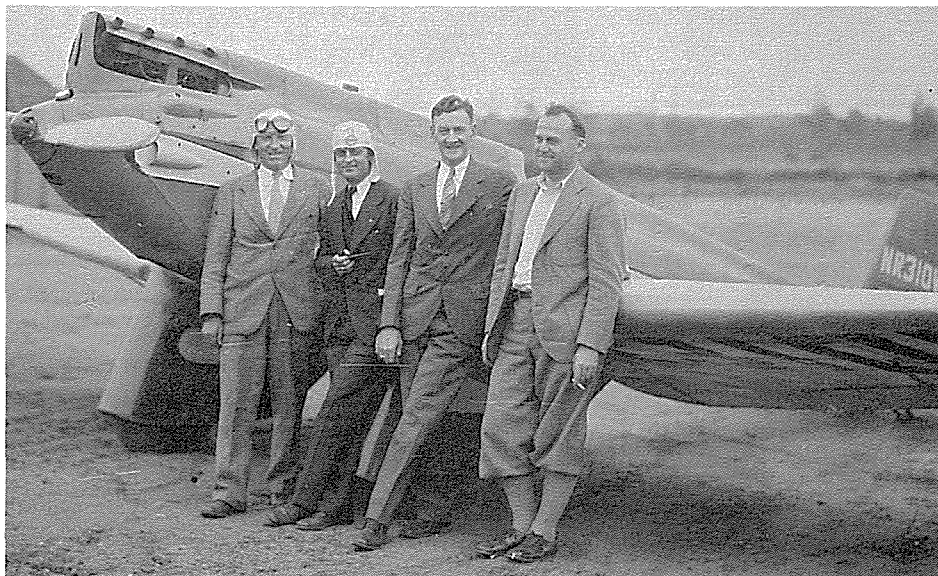
Krapish's K-4 Monoplane, a trim, low wing design first appeared in the Aircraft Registration lists of July 1930, as NR310V, c/n 1. Krapish's address was then given as Kearney, N.J.⁷ The contemporary magazine *Aviation*, noted its emergence a few months earlier, including a comment that it was completed after two years construction work.⁸ In charge of construction was his friend, James Stevenson, who had been superintendent of the Moth Aircraft Co.⁹

The K-4 had its maiden flight on March 1930, from a piece of flat meadow farmland. It was a beautiful first flight, performing gracefully through numerous maneuvers. Later, on one occasion, Col. Lindbergh flew the K-4 and was evidently impressed with its performance. It was reported that he said to Jim Stevenson, "It's a beauty, Jim. I would like one for myself, built from the same plans."¹⁰

A fellow New England aviator, George R. Garmon, joined Al in 1929 in the K-4 project. He was to provide promotional material, fly the aircraft throughout the New







Left above — Alexander P. Krapish in an early photograph. At right, (l. to r.) Al Krapish, George Garmon, Jim Stevenson and Sam

Rolandson. Sam was a test pilot for the Moth Aircraft Corp. also, under Krapish. (Photo— Courtesy of Russell Field, 24 Sept. 1929)

England area, and campaign to raise the necessary capital to put the K-4 into production. However, his task came too closely upon the heels of the devastating stock market crash of October 1929 and the K-4 fell, a victim of the economic times.¹¹ Although the airplane was registered with the state of Massachusetts as Private, No. 30, on 1 May 1931 and the address for the Krapish Aircraft Co. was Squantum, Mass., the final disposition of the K-4 is not known.¹²

The company's brochure stated that the airplane was developed "to fill the long-felt need for a really good looking airplane with a high degree of performance."¹³ While lacking in forward pilot visibility, it certainly filled the bill on the first count and it must have been the object of much attention as it visited the many New England flying fields. One such visit was recorded at the "What-Cheer" airport in Pantucket, R.I. (now the site of the Narragansett Park Race Track).

The K-4 was equipped with dual controls and brakes and though originally built with a tail skid, a tail wheel was "to be incorporated in future ships." The main wheels were Goodyear balloon type. The full cantilever wing eliminated all external wires and struts and the tail surfaces were also internally braced. The fuselage and tail surfaces were fabric covered, but the wing appears to have been plywood covered and was detachable from the fuselage.

The colors of the K-4 included blue fuselage, vertical tail surfaces and landing strut fairings with a cream colored wing, horizontal tail surfaces and fuselage trim. It was powered with a DeHavilland "Gipsy," 85-100 hp, four cylinder, air-cooled, in-line engine; the same engine that was used on the Moth aircraft. This engine was later to be manufactured, under license, by the Wright Aeronautical Corp., but the K-4 was equipped with the English version as evidenced by the propeller direction of rotation.

Further details of the life of Al Krapish and of his airplane and its final disposition, will be welcomed by the author.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Acknowledgement of assistance is accorded John C. Fulton and Robert E. Kane of AAHS; Crocker Snow, Director of Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission; Russell Field; and in particular, George R. Garmon for the Krapish K-4 brochure and other data.

SPECIFICATIONS AND PERFORMANCE DATA (11)

Wing Span	30 feet
Length	24 feet
Weight (empty)	950 lbs.
Weight (gross)	1650 lbs.
Wing area	140 sq. feet
Wing loading	12 lbs/sq. feet
Power loading per h.p.	19.5 lbs.
Landing Speed	46 mph
Max. Speed	132 mph
Cruising Speed	115 mph
Glide Ratio	12/1 (22/1 was an unofficial figure)
Rate of Climb (at sea level)	800 ft/min
Cruising Range	650 miles

REFERENCES:

1. Letter, Crocker Snow to author, Feb. 24, 1966. Mr. Snow is Director of the Mass. Aeronautics Commission at the Logan Airport in Boston and has been associated with New England aviation history for 50 years.
2. *The Aircraft Yearbook for 1930*, Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce, D. Van Nostrand Co.
3. Letter, George R. Garmon to author, 8 Jan. 1970. He was Naval Aviator No. 2078, with F.A.I. license No. 468, and still resides in the city of Lowell, Mass.
4. Telephone conversations, various, Mr. Garmon and author, 1968-69.
5. Letter, Dr. Igor Sikorsky to author, 20 Feb. 1969.
6. Letter, J.S. McCullough to author, 10 Feb. 1970.
7. *Air Transportation Magazine*, July 15, 1930.
8. *Aviation Magazine*, March 15 & 29, 1930.
9. James Stevenson had been an inspector at the Springfield (Mass.) Armory during World War I and in WWII was with Consolidated Vultee aircraft Corp. in San Diego as an inspector. He died in August 1965 at Strafford, Conn.
10. Field, Russell. (News item), *Valley News*, West Lebanon, N.H., 17 April 1965.
11. Letter, G. Garmon, Ibid.
12. Letter, C. Snow, Ibid.
13. "The Krapish Low Wing Monoplane," Brochure, Krapish Aircraft Co., circa 1930.

NEXT NEWSLETTER, No. 17, JANUARY 1971

The next *Newsletter* will carry the results of the election of Directors and the announcement of the *Contributor's Award*. See notice re: Annual Dues and ballots on Page 273. Annual dues \$10 beginning 1971.