

NEWS & COMMENT from the Members

The NEWS and COMMENT section is open to all Members of the Society for statements on any aspect of aviation history or for expressions regarding the affairs of the Society. The chief purpose is to bring forth the facts, including the airing of controversies. It serves to present information in brief form which Members might not feel moved to contribute as complete articles. Opinions are welcomed but such opinions, and the accuracy of the information contained therein, are the responsibility solely of the contributor.

THE LONG DISTANCE SPOTTER

M.J. Hooks, Editor, AIR-BRITAIN DIGEST

There has recently been coverage in the press of the case of one Colin Sharpies, an aircraft enthusiast whose age, according to which paper you read, varies between 19 and 25. Mr. Sharpies took his holidays in Yugoslavia and ran foul of the regime when he was, allegedly, caught near a military airfield writing down the serials of military aircraft with the aid of a pair of binoculars. He subsequently spent some days in jail, was quite probably an embarrassment to HM Government, and as we write this, has been released without charges being made.

Mr. Sharpies is a very fortunate young man; he is not a member of *Air-Britain* but frankly, even if he was, our attitude would have been the same — he asked for what he got.

Even in this enlightened country, the intelligent enthusiast does not hang over the fence of a military establishment with a pair of binoculars, notebook, or camera, and to do

any of these things in a foreign country, let alone one behind the iron curtain, is courting disaster. It must be remembered that authorities in other countries do not take a lenient view of this type of behavior, and think that anyone who is collecting information is obviously doing so for a purpose. What this purpose is does not really matter; it must be stamped out and an example made. The British enthusiast does not realize how free he is until something of this nature occurs. But even then authority will only tolerate so much. Some of the duplicated news-sheets available to members of the specialist groups of enthusiasts are sailing very close to the wind with their reports on military comings and goings and we would advise them to watch the security angle with more care than they have exercised so far. *Air-Britain Digest* does seem to bend over backward where security is concerned. But it has taken many years to establish the Association in its present position of trust with the authorities, and we do not intend to jeopardize this position by the publication of "hot" material.

Editor's note: The above editorial was printed in the Sept. 1970 *Air Britain Digest* and is reproduced here with permission as being also appropriate to the AAHS and its *JOURNAL*.

FIRST FLIGHT OF L-1011

Editor

Lockheed Aircraft Corporation's L-1011 Tristar made its first flight on Monday, 16 November, 1970, from Palmdale Airport California with Hank Dees at the controls. The new wide-bodied jetliner was powered by three Rolls-Royce RB.211 engines. The registration number for L-1011 was relinquished to Lockheed by one of their employees, E.E. Hansen, who had had it — N1011 — for his Piper Apache.



A VERY SHORT R&D

H.L. Elman, Glastonbury, Connecticut

like many falsehoods in history, "Everyone knows the story." Referring to the origin of the fighter aeroplane, we have all heard many times how the pre-War French test pilot Garros bolted wedges of steel to his prop so that he could fire a machine-gun forward without chewing up his prop. We know how this contraption enabled him to down 5 German planes and become the World's First Ace. If he had lasted one mission more or one less would we now count Ace in multiples of some other number than 5?

Then, ground fire downed him, and he was unable to burn his airplane before capture. The wreck was given to Tony Fokker, and in a time so short that it has always been suspect, the great Fokker turned out the first fighter airplane — complete with interrupter gear.

As historians many of us have been suspicious of this story since interrupter gear patents in several countries *preceded* the Great War. In 1968, a WWI test pilot, Frank T. Courtney, raised the points that nagged many. Could Garros, who had been a Morane pilot on a test of an early French interrupter gear, have had more on his airplane than just the triangular plates? Could Fokker have received some actual interrupter or synchronizing hardware in the crashed Morane? Courtney claimed that the early French gear *DID* work - that defective ammunition which gave wrong muzzle velocities had caused the delicate timing of the synchronization to be thrown off in the French tests.

By this theory, Garros had the plates installed, *not* to function in the absence of interrupter gear but to act as a safety device whenever the synchronization failed to work properly. Since both the test airplane and that one later captured with Garros were Moranes of the same or similar model, the obvious path of inquiry is to find the serial numbers or other identification of the two planes. Other paths to prove or disprove this theory also exist.



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As a research engineer this author does not believe Fokker's claims of such short development time. His claim to the interrupter gear he produced, if valid, would seem to indicate that he worked longer in secret and simply used the drama of the moment for the unveiling.

DOUGLAS DC-4E

Edward J. Young, Santa Monica, California

Although the paragraphs about the Douglas DC-4E in the Spring Journal, Page 32, (Volume 15, No. 1, Spring 1970) were a delight to find, the statement about the DC-4E sold to Japan being the second prototype is in error. There was only one. It first flew on 7 June 1938 and was used by several airlines for evaluation and route studies. It was determined that the production airplane would require complete redesign and the first (redesigned) DC-4's were on the assembly line at the start of World War II. These were converted to C-54's prior to reaching the end of the assembly line.

The 1938 prototype was known in its time as the DC-4 (all of its engineering drawings bear this model number). It was redesignated DC-4E "posthumously" to avoid confusion with the later DC-4's (C-54 type). The DC-4E was reassembled and flight tested by Douglas technicians in Tokyo. The Japanese were reported to have crashed it into Tokyo Bay on its first flight.

Some comparison statistics are worth repeating. The DC-4E of 1938 had a span of 138 feet compared to the DC-4 of 1942 with 117.5 feet. Its weight empty was 44,742 pounds but the DC-4 was only 40,806 pounds. Both used Pratt & Whitney engines of the same horsepower, 1,450 each, the DC-4E having four R-2180 SIAG and the DC-4 with 4 R-2800-2SD13-G.

The DC-4 was also somewhat faster at cruising speed of 219 MPH versus 200 for the DC-4E, although its maximum speed was slightly less than that of DC-4E. In all, there were 1,242 DC-4 airplanes made including the military version, C-54.

AVIATION MEMORIALS

Merle Olmsted, Wichita Falls, Texas

The Aviation Memorials shown in the Journal Winter 1970, reminded me of one which should be illustrated. It is in Memorial Park, a cemetery in Davenport, Iowa, erected in honor of United States flyers who lost their lives in WW II, by the parents of Lt. Robert A. Alexander, USMC, killed in action on 30 September 1943 in the Solomon Islands.

ERRATA

Roland Poehlmann writes that his color photos of the ADW-I's delivered to Sweden were misleading. The editor interpreted the colors as orange, whereas he states that the airplanes were painted a very bright and shiny yellow. Further, some of the airplanes showed their registration numbers on the upper surface of the right wing while others do not.

The author of the article "Loughhead Sport Biplane, Cedric Galloway, reports the captions for the photographs on Pages 240 and 241 were reversed. ("Yup!" Editor. Ref. Journal of AAHS, Winter 1970). Also, the photograph of the A-4E, "Super Echo," shown on Page 220 as credited to Roy Lock, is really the work of Frank MacSorley, Jr.

The following poem is appropriate to the JOURNAL and its composure problems. Let's just say that the Editor

knows the feeling only too well. It was by Leo Aikman, printed in the *Atlanta Constitution*, submitted through the courtesy of Sears McCarrison.

*"The typographical error is a slippery thing and sly.
You can hunt until you're dizzy, but somehow it gets
by.*

*'Til the forms are off the presses, but strange how still
it keeps.*

It shrinks into a corner and never stirs or peeps.

The typographical error is too small for human eyes.

*'Til the ink is on the paper, then it grows to mountain
size.*

*The boss, he stares with horror and tears his hair and
groans;*

*The reader who okayed the proofs just drops his head
and moans,*

*For all the other printing may be clean as clean can
be-*

*But the typographical error is the only thing you
see."*

MID-AIR COLLISION

Henry Villard, Chalet les Sapins, Gstaad, Switzerland

The Journal Winter 1970 (page 271) cited the date of the first fatal mid-air collision as 12 June 1912. Of possible interest to the Flight Safety Foundation, may be the collision which took place at the air meet at Milan, Italy in the fall of 1910. Capt. Bertram Dickson was rammed from the rear by a French pilot, Rene Thomas. Although it did not have immediately fatal consequences, Dickson never fully recovered from his injuries and died on Sept. 28th, 1913.* This is believed to be the first mid-air collision.

*Ref: H. Villard. *CONTACT - The Story of the Early Birds*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1968.

SWEDISH CURTISS H81A's

Ola Laveson, Stockholm, Sweden

It was surprising to find some information in the Fall 1970 issue of the AAHS Journal indicating that the Swedish Air Force (was scheduled to receive) some Curtiss fighters during the war under Lend-Lease contract.

From mid-1939 the Swedish Air Commission operated in U.S.A. and was instructed to buy aircraft and other equipment to strengthen our small Air Force. Among the fighter types tested was the Curtiss fighter. It was test flown by Major Nils Soderberg and found attractive.* As a result of



IDENTIFICATION REQUIRED

Will the Member who forwarded the negative for the above picture get in touch with the Editor immediately, please?

our winter weather conditions it was necessary to use aircraft which could be equipped with retractable skis, a thing which Republic EP-1 could offer but not the Curtiss fighter, and no contract was ever signed with the Curtiss company.

*Retired Major General Nils Soderberg was a few weeks ago elected chairman of the Swedish Aviation Historical Society.

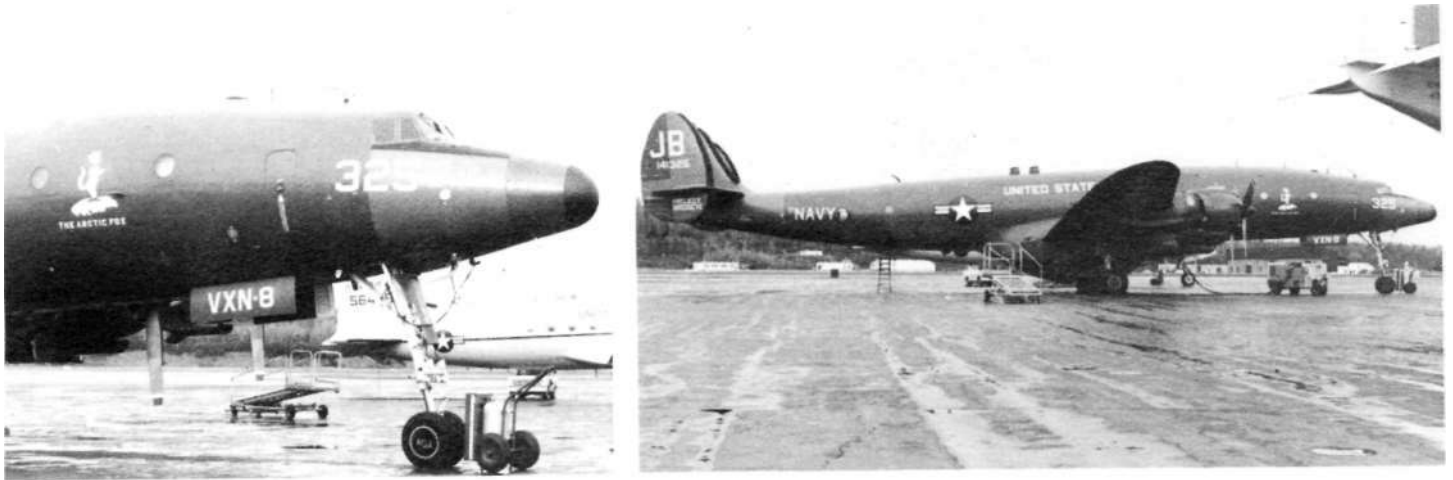
THE FINAL TRIP

William D. Siuru and William G. Holder, Dayton, Ohio

There recently occurred here at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base an event which should be of interest to members of the Society, movement of the finest collection of historical aircraft in the world, the Air Force Museum, to its new home seven miles away. The event was covered by the authors with great excitement.

At one point in the Journey, the signal lights over an intersection were temporarily rigged at a higher elevation, and the regular poles were taken down. The B-25 is shown just passing through. The B-24 had the wings removed for the journey and was preceded by one of the crew shown here directing its traverse across the bridge where the curbs were very close to both wheels. The B-70 made its slowest journey ever, towed by an attachment to its nose gear. The B-58 Hustler was placed on a flat-bed truck for its seven mile journey. This B-58 is the one which has won the 1962 Bendix Trophy.





PROJECT BIRDSEYE

By Albert C. Piccirillo, Anchorage, Alaska

Project BIRDSEYE was an Arctic ice research program conducted by the Naval Oceanographic Office during the winter of 1970-71. The aims of this project were the improvement of ice observing techniques, the refinement of forecasting and the acquisition of data for present and future military Arctic operations. A specially modified Lockheed NC-121K (bureau number 141325) belonging to the U.S. Navy's Oceanographic Development Squadron EIGHT (VXN-8) was used for this project. Flying from Thule AB, Greenland and Eielson AFB, Alaska on missions over the Baffin Bay, Arctic Ocean and Beaufort Sea, the airplane carried the name THE ARCTIC FOX along with a white fox emblem painted on the fuselage. Ice data was collected by visual observation, laser profiling, radar plotting and photography. In addition to surface ice conditions, in flight meteorological data were recorded.

The airplane was painted midnight blue, with high-visibility red nose, and tail. The control surfaces were all midnight blue however. Anti-glare panel, radar nose, and de-icing boots were black. "Project Birdseye" shows on the vertical fin under the stabilizer.

GEN. ARNOLD'S RECOLLECTION

Donald M. Bishop, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama

General Arnold's recollection (in *Global Mission*; quoted in "The 1st Aero Squadron, U.S.A.S.", *JOURNAL of AAHS* Spring & Fall 1969) that the 1st Aero Squadron was

stationed in Nogales, Arizona, in 1917, is not substantiated by contemporary records. Rather, the Squadron remained at Columbus, New Mexico, until its departure for France.

Records of the activity of the 1st Aero Squadron between the end of the Mexican Punitive Expedition in February and the departure of the Squadron for France on 13 August 1917 are sparse. The Squadron history contained in the Gorrell Report and in the War Department Historical files, both at the National Archives, make no mention of the Squadron's operations or its location during the March-July time period. Almost all accounts and histories of the 1st Aero Squadron depend on the history included in the Gorrell Report, which would not have been written until 1918 or 1919.

There are records in the National Archives which were written at the time in question. These are the unit "strength returns." The monthly report forms submitted by the 1st Aero Squadron in March, April, May, and June of 1917 all indicate that the Squadron was located at Columbus, New Mexico.*

The evidence of these strength returns would not preclude flights by Squadron aircraft into Arizona, nor would they refute the substance of General Arnold's account - that the 1st Aero Squadron was protesting that it was left behind when the 1st Division went overseas. However, the strength returns do not substantiate his specific recollection (made in 1949, some 32 years after the fact) that the Squadron was in Nogales.

*See also Reinhold, Ruth M. "1st Aero Squadron in Arizona, *JOURNAL of AAHS*, Fall 1970, page 205. The 1st Aero was in Arizona but only briefly, a few trips by itinerant airplanes from the Columbus base.

