

PITY THE POOR BEGINNER

One of our more astute members has made the following comment about the Journal which well justifies our thoughtful consideration. Often we take too much for granted and it is good for everyone concerned to stop and evaluate the success or failure of our communications.

He says: "It occurs to me that I am really a novice in regards to the history of aircraft, I have long enjoyed taking pictures of aircraft, but I never bothered to record anything. Now you fellows publish "N" numbers and c/n's which I have never heard of. I am guessing that it refers to the constructor's number, but that's merely a guess. What about an article in our Journal for the beginners. Tell us what important data about an airplane is required. Maybe all of the members but me know this, but I am waddling around in a maze of numbers without knowing one from another."

The only truthful answer to this, from the standpoint of the collector, is that each individual has a perfect right to collect as much, or as little, information as he desires. Those of us who collect more than others feel that we do so for a constructive reason, for our own benefit and others, but we are not in a position to say that therefore this is the way it must be done. If you, and others, get enjoyment from simply taking photos of pianos there is no reason why you should have to bother with unwanted details.

There is, however, a reason for this pursuance of information; that which in British slang is called "gen". It is simply that each item contributes to a fuller understanding and knowledge of the individual airplane photographed, and in turn to a broader knowledge of production and aviation in general. The "c/n", which is British terminology for "constructor's number" (termed manufacturers serial number by U.S. companies) is used to avoid duplication with military "serial" numbers, and has been adopted by AAHS to correspond with the greatest mass of such information available - Air Pictorial, Air Britain, and other British publications. The importance of this number lies in the fact that it usually stays the same throughout the life of the a/c, whereas the civil registrations, military serials, and other more temporary identifications may come and go. Thus if you wish to trace the life history of one airplane the c/n is the very basic core that ties all the pieces together. This has a distinct historical value, for to make notes from five photos of DC-3's might lead to the very false assumption that five different planes are portrayed when in actuality it is the same identical airplane photographed under five different conditions. This is shown in an excellent manner in the Lockheed Vega article in this issue; note how one airplane will weave about through various registrations but keeps its basic c/n throughout. Thus the overall picture of production, use and history hinges on a knowledge of the exact identity of the airplane that you photograph. Its history also hinges on those letters and numbers that appear on its external surface, for they tell a great deal as to its military or civilian status, nationality, and perhaps its certified category.

To do a thorough job of historical reporting, particularly for the benefit of yourself or others twenty or thirty years from now when those details become hazy, one should: 1) Note the c/n, from the nameplate, registration certificate, or whatever source is available; 2) Note the registration and any external markings (these may not always be visible in your photo); 3) Note the date and location of the photo

(dates are extremely important for reconstructing history at a later date); 4) Note the coloring if a B&W photo; 5) Note the engine model and details as this is often the major modification of a given models; Try to take photos, wherever possible, that show as much of the markings as possible. This is becoming more and more of a problem . with the new fuselage registrations and no wing registrations.

Much more could be said about this, but the following letter to the editor in the June 14, 1947 issue of The Aeroplane Spotter shows that there are two sides to this question, and you are not alone in your attitude;

"While I must congratulate you on achieving and upholding the standards of The Aeroplane Spotter, as probably the best three-pennyworth in the market for the air-minded, I feel bound to deplore the space spent from the all-too-meager paper allowance on "Registration Notes", "CofA's issued", "Changes of Ownership", "Civil Register News", and "what have you!"

The last half-dozen issues have seen not less than one page, sometimes two, squandered on the type of detail which can be of interest only to those private owners directly concerned, and mis-guided fanatics who like nothing so much as comparing registration numbers as they doubtless once compared match-box tops; or still do far all I know.

The logical development of this state of affairs is too ludicrous to contemplate, involving as it does the publication of the manufacturer's serial number of each spark plug and the description of each owners tattoo or birth marks, family tree, financial condition, dental chart, and so on. Using your entire available space, a modified form of this might just be feasible at present. You would need a volume as big as the London Telephone directory in a few years, so why not "retract" while it can still be done with dignity and, before your name is crowded off the front page by the rising flood of trivia?

Even if you feel you must still follow this disastrous plunge into the vortex - of G-AXXX, you might at least save type and ink by printing 387 ditto marks under Autocrat. Even the collectors might be damped, by rows of commas.

It is also becoming increasingly obvious from the later pages of the inexhaustible "Spitfire Notebook" that Spitfire pilots stayed up half the night making unpremeditated and unrecorded mods. to their machines. Perhaps they intended them to remain unrecorded* I beg you sincerely to consider this.

I do not hope to influence policy with this letter. Just scrap "Registration Notes" for three editions out of four and I shall be three-quarters satisfied. In any event, thank you for eleven excellent pages. H. Sanderson."

THE JACK KNIGHT AIR MAIL SOCIETY

The Jack Knight Air Mail Society is a world-wide organization devoted to the interests of collectors of Air Mail labels. First Flight Covers, Aviation Postcards, Airport Dedication Covers, Historical Data etc. Dues are \$3.00 per year and the Society's headquarters are at Brookfield, Illinois. The Society publishes a quarterly Journal, called THE AIR LOG, which is usually from 35-70 mimeographed, illustrated pages, covering the subjects listed above. Further information may be obtained from the Society's president, Earl H. Wellman, 3532 Oak Avenue, Brookfield, Illinois* It is hoped that we will have an article on label collecting in the next issue of the AAHS Journal to explain this fascinating hobby.