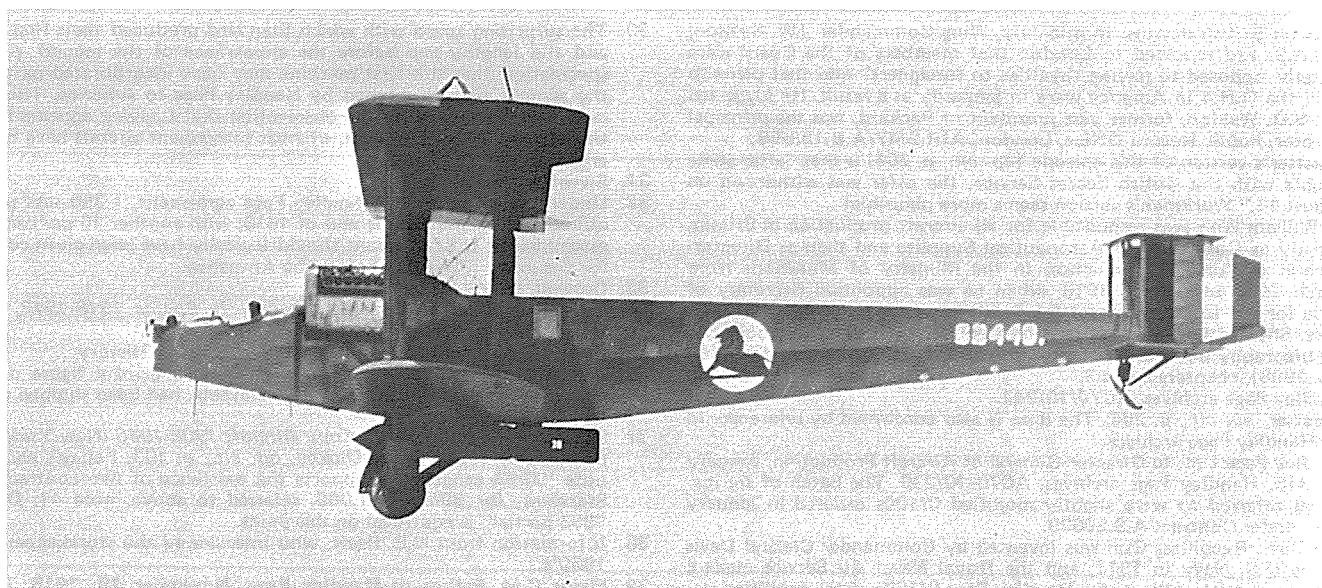




POSTWAR USE OF HANDLEY PAGE IN U.S.

By JOHN UNDERWOOD

The first 40 Standard-built O/400s followed the Langley off the production line in July. These were shipped in crates unassembled to England and are believed to have arrived at Liverpool in August. During this period the Standard factory played host to a steady stream of notables. Secretary of War Newton Baker, eager to see the weapon that promised to pound the Kaiser's legions to dust, called immediately after his conference in France with the Chiefs of Staff. Baker was followed by Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes, who came for a different reason. Charges of widespread corruption had been leveled at the aircraft industry and Hughes, heading a Presidential Commission, was determined to learn whether or not the Handley Page program was involved. Apparently it was not.

On the 15th of November, four days after the armistice, the Langley landed on the Washington Polo Grounds. President and Mrs. Wilson were among the scores of distinguished visitors who came out to inspect the huge bomber. Mrs. Wilson boldly climbed a ladder up to the flight deck for a look inside, but the President kept his feet firmly on the ground. A demonstration flight was made, during which the Langley was said to have come perilously close to the trees at the end of the grounds. It chalked up one for the Book of Records on Thanksgiving Day by going aloft with a dozen passengers bent on having their turkey in the air. Among the diners was Capt. Benjamin Lipsner, Superintendent of the U.S. Aerial Mail Service.

It appears that Standard had orders for 1,500 Handley Pages at the time of the armistice. Washington issued a stream of cancellations immediately after the cessation of hostilities and available information indicates that this amounted to 1,393 units in the case of the O/400. In addition to the 100 units shipped to England, one O/400 was assembled at Elizabeth in November, before the armistice. It was publicized early in December as the "first machine-built Handley Page" (ref. *Aviation*, Dec. 1, 1918, page 560). Whether the Langley ever became an Air Service property is unknown. Very possibly it did not.

Capt. Benjamin Lipsner refers in his book, "The Air Mail—Jennys to Jets," to 400 unfinished O/400s in Standard warehouses. Lipsner believed that the airplane would make an ideal mail transport and opened negotiations for their purchase and completion. Only a few minor parts were needed to get them into service. Harry B. Mingle, Standard's chief executive, eager to promote the O/400's postwar potential, was effusive. Twelve of

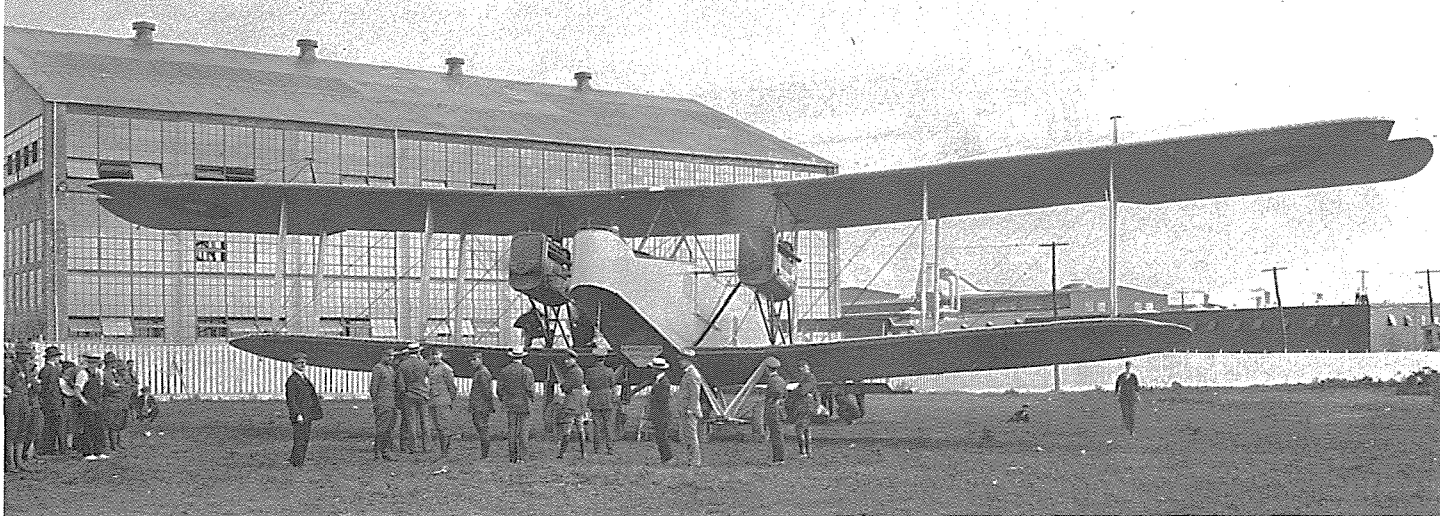
them (ref. *Aviation*, c. November 1918, page 629) were being prepared for the projected NYC-Chicago night mail service late in 1918.

Lipsner had his senior pilot, Max Miller, fly the Langley with the factory test pilot, an RCAF captain named Brown. According to Lipsner, Miller was so enthusiastic that he wanted to loop the big plane. It was easy to fly once the pilot got used to being 12 feet off the runway. When Lipsner returned to Elizabeth to make final arrangements he was puzzled to find Mingle reluctant to make any commitments. It then became known that the chief shareholders of Standard Aircraft Corporation were Japanese nationals. The Mitsui banking interests made all the important decisions. For reasons never explained they elected to destroy the unfinished O/400s rather than sell them to the post office department.

Exactly how many O/400s were delivered to the Air Service is uncertain. A report published by the Aircraft Bureau of Production (ref. *Aerial Age Weekly*, June 9, 1919, page 644) stated that a further six units were assembled and delivered after the armistice, thus completing the amended contract. These were assigned Air Service serial numbers 62445 through 62451. This would indicate that a total of seven were on charge at that time. However, Bowers and Swanborough in "United States Military Aircraft Since 1909" give the figure as eight.

The first Standard-built O/400 to come to grief was A.S. 62447. This aircraft suffered a power loss after leaving the factory and came down on the mud flats beside the Elizabeth River on March 10, 1919. It nosed over and was damaged to the extent that it was probably written off. No one was injured. The pilot, Capt. Norbert Carolin, was one of the Army's senior fliers. A.S. 62447 was to have airlifted a grand piano from Philadelphia to New York City for the aero exposition then in progress at Madison Square Garden. It is worth mentioning that the Langley was billed as one of the show's featured attractions.

Lt. Phillips Melville, whose introduction to the O/400 at Ford Junction had been interrupted by the armistice, was the engineering officer at Hazelhurst Field when the first Handley Page arrived from the factory. It is his recollection that it was A.S. 62447, which would place the event some time before Capt. Carolin's accident. It was being ferried to Ellington Field by Lt. Geo. Palmer and Melville was directed to get checked out. The checkout was as brief as they come; once around with Palmer,



(Opposite page) A.S. 62448 over Aberdeen Proving Ground with Army's first 4,000-lb. bomb, Sept. 30, 1921. Pilot believed to be Capt. Norbert Carolin. Red lion couchant emblem, superimposed on white circle, designed by AAHS member Phillips Melville for 1st Provisional Air Brigade, USAF

(Above) The "Langley" during engine runup, while representatives of U.S. Army Air Service and R.A.F. look on. Tall man with straw hat and back to camera is Charles Healy Day, Standard's chief engineer. David Winans

then once around by himself.

Not long afterward Melville was summoned to Elizabeth to collect another O/400. This he believes was A.S. 62448. It was to be picked up at Hazelhurst by a ferry pilot from Ellington, but remained unclaimed for several months. Melville took the opportunity to become better acquainted. He flew it up and down 5th Avenue during the great homecoming parade and again, with Alex de Seversky in the forward gunner's station, for an abortive National Guard demonstration.

Melville was supposed to tow a pair of banners over the Cotton Exchange Convention on May 3, 1919, but one of the Libertys was giving trouble and it was decided to make a trial flight beforehand. There was a 15-mile cross-wind on the preferred runway, but he took off anyway. It was nearly Melville's undoing. The windward side started flying first, imposing a severe load on the left landing gear. A tire blew and the O/400 came to an abrupt stop standing on its nose. Melville and his crew chief, M/Sgt. Lewis Williams, were thrown out when the nose broke off. This saved them from being crushed in the cockpit. Fortunately no one was hurt.

On the last day of May one of the Ellington-based O/400s chalked up another first for the Book of Records. At 2,000 feet over Houston, Chaplain J.E. Rees, standing in the bomb bay and shouting at the top of his voice, united Lt. R.W. Meade and Marjorie Dumont in happy wedlock. The wedding party numbered 12, including Capt. W.E. Killgore, the pilot. Two days later another O/400 made news by completing its ferry flight to Ellington in record time. This aircraft, possibly the last O/400 built, flew the 1,525 miles from Elizabeth to Houston via New Orleans in just over 17½ hours. On board were 10 officers and enlisted men, including the pilot, Capt. Clyde C. Dunnington.

Three Handley Pages were awaiting ferry crews at Hazelhurst when a freak thunderstorm swept the area on the 28th of July. Winds of gale force demolished buildings and uprooted trees. Lt. Melville had just removed one of the O/400s from the main hangar to make room for a newly arrived Martin earmarked for a nonstop cross-country flight. In the same hangar was a large Caproni triplane. Both were destroyed when the roof fell in. The Handley Page was being tied down when the wind picked it up and dumped it end over end three times. The others somehow escaped serious damage.

In England, meanwhile, plans were being made to utilize large numbers of surplus O/400s for freight and passenger services. The R.A.F.'s new Super Handley Page V/1500 had made news by carrying 40 passengers on a publicity flight over London. The V/1500 had four 375 hp Eagles and a span of 126 feet. Its range, with auxiliary tankage, made it a likely candidate for the \$45,000 prize awaiting the first crew to make a nonstop Atlantic crossing. Basically it was a scaled-up O/400.

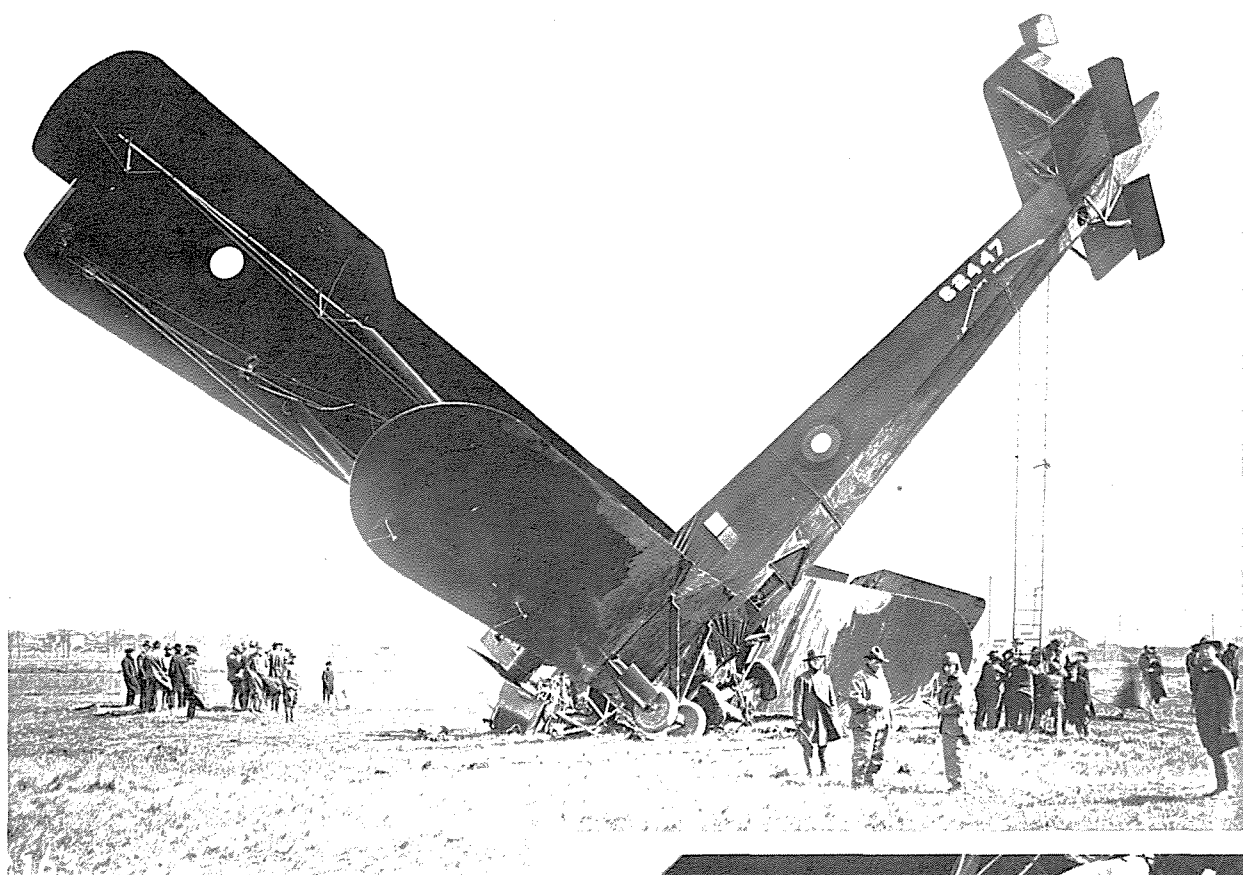
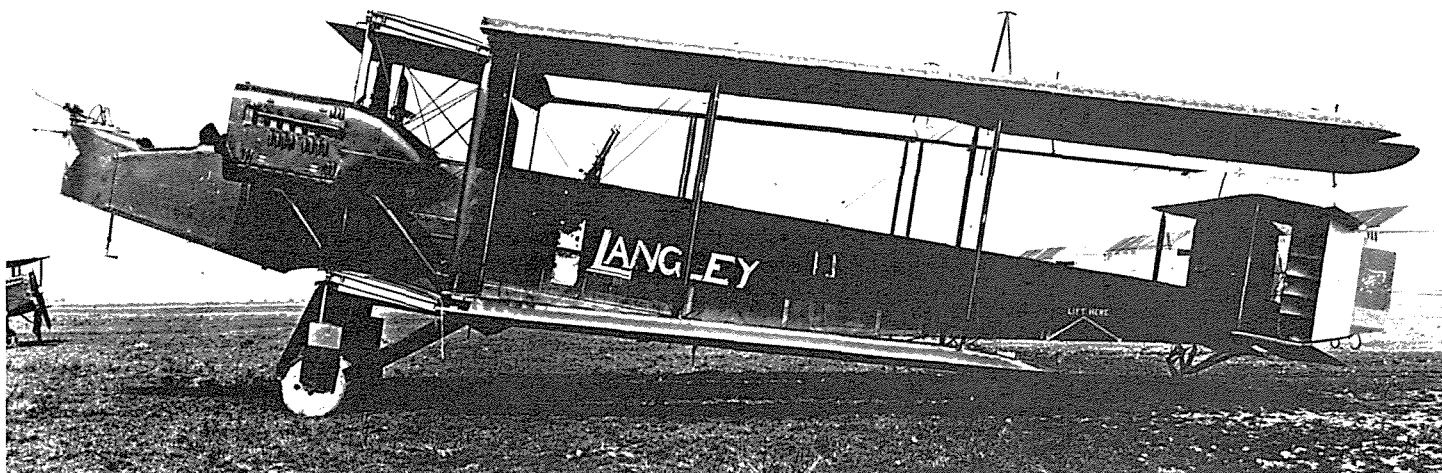
Handley Page Air Transport Ltd. began passenger service between London and Paris with a converted O/400 on the 25th of August, 1919. There is a remote possibility that this aircraft, G-EAAF, was one of the Standard-built O/400s delivered to England late in 1918. Certainly it belongs in the annals of commercial aviation as the first true airliner in service anywhere in the world. Its comfortable, fully enclosed cabin accommodated a dozen fares and two more could be carried in the forward observer's seat. In September service was extended to Brussels and Amsterdam.

Concurrently with the opening of commercial services in Europe, the American Handley Page Company was incorporating in Ogdensburg, N.Y. William H. Workman was the chief promoter of the firm which was reputedly capitalized with a \$5 million stock issue. Activities of this firm are unknown, but it is likely to have had something to do with the abortive flights of the V/1500 originally brought over for the Atlantic contest. An attempt to fly the aircraft with a load of express freight nonstop from N.Y.C. to Chicago ended at Cleveland in a forced landing early in November.

Nothing had been heard of the Langley since the N.Y.C. aero show, but a clue to its fate appears in the pages of *Aerial Age Weekly* (ref. May 31, 1920, page 398). Experimenters at Langley Field had assembled a nameless multiplane which obviously embodied O/400 parts. It may have been inspired by the huge Caproni creations. The monster featured mainplanes stacked in triplicate more or less in line with the c.g. and biplane cellules fore and aft. Power was supplied by three Libertys. It probably never got off the ground and one can't help but think that its makers were perpetrators of a colossal practical joke.

The U.S. Navy held tenaciously to the notion that the battleship was invincible to air attack. Brig. Gen. William E. Mitchell, then Assistant Chief of the Air Service, thought otherwise and staked his career on it. For every dollar spent on battleships, Mitchell wanted—indeed demanded—an equal sum for air power. Washington finally gave Billy the chance to prove his unorthodox ideas about bombing. The story of Mitchell's demonstrations, culminating in the dramatic sinking of the Ostfriesland in July 1921, is well known. Not so well known is the part played by the O/400.

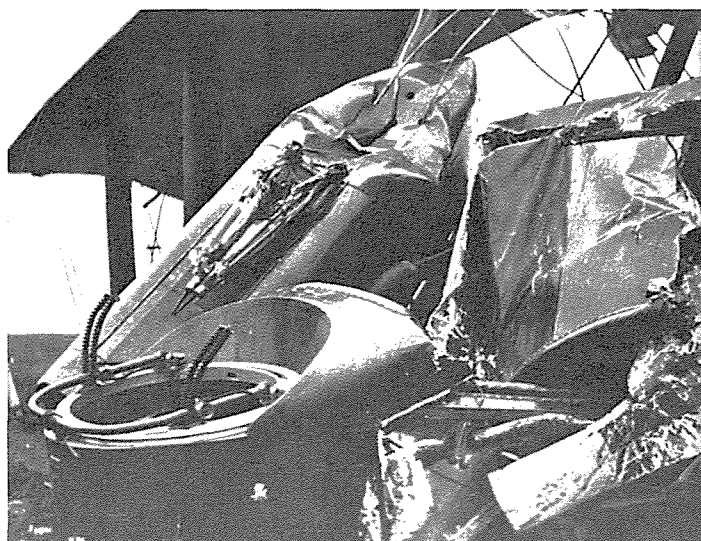
Mitchell managed to round up about 90 war-weary planes for his 1st Provisional Air Brigade. Among them were some 40 DH-4s, two Capronis and at least three O/400s. These were later supplemented by 15 Martins. The Brigade, based at Aberdeen Proving Ground and Langley Field, was engaged for several months in bombing experiments off Hampton Roads. In the course of these experiments Mitchell evolved his "water hammer" theory, the gist of which was that near misses could be more damaging to a warship than a direct hit. Till then the largest "egg" in



(Top) "Langley" with wings folded. This reduced overall width to 31 feet, thus facilitating storage. Military roundels and tail stripes, but no A.S. serial number suggests it's not Air Service property. USAF

(Middle) A.S. 62447 (?) after forced landing on mud flats beside Elizabeth River, March 10, 1919. Capt. Norbert Carolin, pilot, is facing camera. John Underwood Collection

(Right) Vulnerability of O/400's cockpit in a nose-over is exemplified in this view of A.S. 62447. Fortunately no one hurt. David Winans





One of the minor mysteries of American aviation. G-EAAF, the world's first true airliner in regularly scheduled service, opened the London-Paris service, August 25, 1919. It was withdrawn from service in 1920 and reappeared later at the Curtiss flying meet in April 1922. How it got to Garden City, Long Island, and where it went thereafter has air historians baffled. R.E.G. Davies

Mitchell's basket weighed 1,100 pounds. Billy arranged for the arsenal to manufacture a batch of one ton bombs. Only the O/400s and the Martins could carry such a formidable device.

No Handley Pages were employed in any of the actual bombing demonstrations until the last day, the 21st of July. Mitchell was saving then for the final act of the big show. Field orders called for three O/400s to accompany the main formation of eight Martins on the final attack on the Ostfriesland. Each aircraft was to carry a single one ton bomb, except for one of the O/400s. Its orders were to carry two of Mitchell's "big boys." This directive must have been countermanded at the last minute, because only two of the Handley Pages carried warloads. Both are believed to have been armed with the same one ton loads as the Martins.

Col. Melville, then assigned to one of Mitchell's Martins, recalls that one of the O/400 pilots was indisposed. There were no other qualified pilots available, so Major Davenport Johnson, charged with getting every airworthy plane into the air on time, grabbed the first pilot that came along. This happened to be Lt. Grissom S. Haynes. Haynes had never flown an O/400 before, nor had the crew chief. But orders were orders and they piled into the bomber with several passengers, including Capt. C.H. Roberts. The takeoff was uneventful, but some 20 miles off Cape Charles both engines quit. Lacking knowledge of the fuel system, they had taken off on the reserve tanks. Haynes dumped the bomb as the crew chief switched frantically from tank to tank trying to reestablish fuel flow, all to no avail.

The ditching was successful and no one but the bombardier, who was dunked when the nose went under, got wet. A destroyer, deployed for just such an emergency, picked them up. The O/400 remained afloat and could have been towed to shore, but the skipper pronounced it a menace to navigation and ordered his 5-inch guns to commence firing. It was, Col. Melville recalls, the only satisfaction the Navy got that day from a sinking.

The eight Martins, being faster, unloaded their "big boys" well in advance of the remaining O/400s, only one of which carried a bomb. A.S. 62445 (Fleet #31) dropped a sighting bomb at 12:34. The Ostfriesland was still afloat but just barely. Six minutes later the remaining Handley Page (Fleet #32, believed to be A.S. 62448) administered the coup de grace as the one-time pride of the Imperial German Navy settled beneath the foaming surface.

Martin Caidin in his book, "Air Force," says that A.S. 62448 was the first aircraft to carry a 2-ton bomb. Capt. Carolin was the pilot and the date is said to have been September, 1921. A.S.

62448 was still based at Langley Field in the spring of 1923. It may well have been the last of its kind. Lt. Wendell K. Phillips was supposed to fly it up to Washington for the Shriners Convention on the morning of June 5. Some kind of "stunt" had been arranged. One of the engines may have lost power on the takeoff and the O/400 came down hard on one wheel, breaking the axle. The big plane slammed into a railroad spur at the end of the field and went over on its nose. Phillips was thrown out and killed. The real cause of the accident, according to Col. Melville, was the failure of the badly corroded axle. Thus on a tragic note ended the service history of the American Handley Page.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors wish to thank Col. Phillips Melville (USAF Ret.), MSgt. Merle C. Olmsted, David R. Winans, James N. Eastman, Jr. (Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB), R.E.G. Davies, and A.J. Jackson for background and photographs.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Co-author John Underwood got a Cleveland model (P6E) for Xmas 1938 and has been absorbed with things aeronautical ever since. He wrote an aviation news column for *Koku Fan* while based at Tachikawa in 1955 and became an AAHS member early in 1956. The late Al Lewis of *Air Progress* gave him his first professional employment in journalism. He gravitated to publishing during two years with Clymer Automotive Publications, spent two more with *Private Pilot* before going to Europe as an overseas correspondent. Underwood is the author of several books and specializes in pictorial documentaries. Side interests: foreign travel, motor-gliding and aerobatics.