

NEWS & COMMENT

FROM OUR MEMBERS

SUPERCHARGED CURTISS FALCON

Milton J. Getker, Arlington, Va.

I am able to provide some additional information regarding the Curtiss Falcon that appeared in the Summer '78 Journal, page 154. I have also included photos and information on two other aircraft from the same period.

The photo of the Curtiss Falcon was taken sometime in 1934-35 at the Curtiss-Wright Airport, located in Caldwell, New Jersey. This airport is still heavily in use by business and general aviation.

Curtiss-Wright Corporation had a customer service and pilot training facility and the Wright Aeronautical Corporation division of Curtiss-Wright did all their experimental flight testing at this airport (using one large hangar for both operations).

I was employed by the Curtiss-Wright Airport Services at the time and was very familiar with referenced aircraft and several others that Wright Aeronautical utilized for testing all new prototype engines.

The aircraft in question was a Curtiss Falcon—ex-Army Air Corps, powered by a modified Curtiss Conqueror engine. One of the first GE turbo-superchargers (exhaust driven) was installed, sometime in 1933, mounted directly behind the engine firewall and utilizing the area originally the pilot's cockpit. The observer's cockpit was converted into the pilot's cockpit.

The exhaust and intake system was rather complicated, using much tubing and a great amount of welding. All components were fabricated at the facility. Note the exhaust stack, which extended from supercharger up and through the center section of the upper wing. Waste gates (two on each exhaust manifold) are discernible.

Many high-altitude flights (28,000' to 30,000') were made over a period of two years. The oxygen system used was the standard of the day. An oxygen bottle was mounted in the fuselage, behind the cockpit; oxygen was fed by rubber hoses with a small mouthpiece to pilot and engineer observer.

As much as I can recall, all tests were successfully completed without incident. All data was then compiled and utilized for the turbo-supercharger installation for the Wright R-1820; engine developments which eventually went on the production of the Boeing B-17 aircraft.

While on the subject, it may be of interest to know that in 1937 we installed a turbo-supercharged Wright R-1820 "G" Cyclone on a TWA Northrop GAMMA, with which TWA's famous Captain D.W. Tomlinson conducted many over-weather experimental flights from 1937-1939.

Another rare aircraft, flown by Wright Aeronautical, at Caldwell, at the same time the Falcon was in service, was the "General."



Two views of the Curtiss Falcon owned by Wright Aeronautical for flight testing the G.E. turbo-supercharger. Photo taken ca. 1933-1937.



The "General" was owned and operated by Wright Aeronautical at Caldwell Airport, New Jersey, ca. 1934-1937.

Photo and negatives enclosed for publication if you desire. The "General," manufactured by General Aviation Corporation of Buffalo, N.Y., was built sometime in 1930 or 1931 and was the largest single-engine aircraft ever built in the U.S.A., and as far as known was the only one manufactured.

There was a cabin which could accommodate six to eight passengers; window is discernible midway between engine and open pilot's cockpit. This aircraft had a metal-covered fuselage, wings and tail surfaces fabric covered. It was more a sesquiplane than a biplane.

Wright Aeronautical flight tested all of the prototype "G" Cyclone engines (1000 hp) on the General. Using various types of carburetors, one was the Chandler-Grove, which controlled fuel flow by a venturi principle rather than the float chamber. After completion of the "G" cyclone testing, Wright Aeronautical initiated tests on their first Twin-Row radial engine which was the forerunner of the R-2600 engine.

I believe this aircraft and the Falcon were scrapped just prior to the outbreak of World War II.

Color schemes for both aircraft were black fuselage and International orange wings.

Chief test pilot for Wright Aero, at time photos were taken, was Herb Schebat, who

left Wright Aero in 1938, and joined CAA. The fellow sitting on the Falcon landing wheel is Al Lee, flight test manager. Some of our members may have known Al or Herb.

CHAGRIN SINKS INTO HISTORY OR DEATH OF AN AIRPORT

Sterling Hubbard, Gates Mills, Ohio

In April 1979, the airport at Chagrin Falls, Ohio, closed after fifty years of operation. It is likely that more pilots learned flying at this field than at any other in Ohio. It was a busy and profitable airport to the end, and the end came when the one hundred and thirty-one acres under it rose in value to eight thousand dollars an acre.

In 1927 this land, three miles east of Chagrin Falls on Bell Road, belonged to Albert Warren, who farmed it. He was interested in flying and when approached by a World War I pilot for permission to use a strip of the farm for landings, he gladly gave it. The pilot was Lee Peck, who had flown for the Royal Flying Corps.

"As I remember," says Bernard McCabe, an early flyer at the field, "Lee Peck was the first one to use Pop Warren's field. He had a Star Cavalier monoplane and built a small tee hangar near the Warren farmhouse. A north-south strip was mowed and was the only one in use for the first year or so."

Two other Chagrin Falls men, Francis Rowe, who flew for the Navy in World War I, and Emory Prior, also a pilot, bought an AVRO Avian. They took on a dealership for the plane which was to be built in Connecticut by the Whittlesey Manufacturing Company.

"I was flying my plane in a field off Hemlock Point Road at the time," continued Bertram McCabe. "The plane was one I built, a four-place open biplane. It had a forty-two-foot wingspan and a Curtis C six-in-line water-cooled engine of 175 hp. In the spring of 1930 Floyd Smith (of Smith's Garage) and I leased the Warren Field for a Chagrin Falls airport. With the help of several others we removed trees, cleared more ground to enlarge the airport, and made a second runway."

That autumn Bernie had trouble on a north takeoff, clipped a few apple trees in the orchard along Chillicothe Road, and hung his big biplane in a seventy-five-foot maple tree. The plane survived, but the propeller did not. This nine-foot, forty-five-pound propeller, one blade split, hung over the mantle of the pilot lounge until the field closed and it was sent to Bernie in Florida. An oval gold emblem on the undamaged blade spells out "American." Above this, "American Sash & Door, Kansas City, Missouri, U.S.A." and beneath it, "Government Award for Distinguished Service."

"After my October accident, and with winter coming on, no more action was taken in 1930. Floyd Smith and I did not renew the field lease the following year."

In 1931 Rowe built a large metal hangar for

Warren, who then went ahead to develop the field further and to lease it out to an operator. Chagrin Falls Village Council voted to lease that half of the Warren farm being used for flying, in spite of the fact that it lay wholly within South Russell Village, their eastern neighbor.

Then began in earnest the greening of Chagrin Falls Airport. On July 10, 1932, a grand opening and dedication ceremony was sponsored by Rowe, Peck, Cliff Henderson and others, including Kiwanis and American Legion with drums and bugles. Cliff Henderson, who managed the National Air Races, also lived in Chagrin Falls. He had a roster of visiting airmen on hand to make plans for the upcoming 1932 air races at Cleveland, and they all came to the dedication. So did ten thousand visitors. Among the celebrities present were Dave Ingalls, who gave the address, Frank Hawks, Jimmy Doolittle, Eddie Rickenbacker, Russell Boardman, Jimmie Haizlip and Alexander de Seversky. The air was full of planes and a blimp, according to a Cleveland news account of the day, and there were twenty-one planes on display. A local dentist, Dr. Donald Stem, flew the first and probably only airmail in an open-cockpit biplane from the new airport to the Cleveland airport thirty miles to the west. A flying school was established on the field by Hal Dungan.

Of these early birdmen Bernie McCabe continued to fly at the field in his new Aeronca C-3 until 1944 when he left for Florida, later to become manager of Albert Whitted Municipal Airport at St. Petersburg.

Wilbur Horn, a pilot for National Air Transport, predecessor of United Airlines, left the airline and started instructing at Lake County Airport in Willoughby, Ohio. In 1940 he moved to Chagrin Falls Airport and opened Horn's Flying School. A year later one of his students, Don Hein, joined him as instructor.

"Wilbur got a Civil Pilot Training contract," says Don Hein, "and things were really popping. With the war getting hotter the Air Corps was yelling for more pilots. I can remember that the day after I got my instructor's rating I flew twelve hours. At one time during the war we had a dozen instructors and almost as many planes. They were mostly Cubs and Taylorcrafts."

After the war Horn spent little time at the field and Don became full-time manager. The two of them bought the land in 1958. Will Horn died in 1972 and Don continued on alone.

On New Year's Eve, 1957, two young aces climbed down from a tall elm tree on the golf course next to their homes leaving behind a Horn's Flying School Cessna 140. It was retrieved by a hundred-foot crane the next day, one wing bent. Trees seemed a perennial problem at Chagrin. A Mr. Pitz, an electrical technician, bought a house and small parcel of land off the end of runway five and planted three sixty-foot trees at the end of the runway. The trees were immediately and mysteriously cut down. New ones went up. Up, down, up down! In court the airport won and, except for a few rocks thrown and an



Bernie McCabe and plane, 1930.



Bernie McCabe's big biplane.



Don Hein in April 1979, with nine-foot anti-que prop.

alleged shotgun blast or two, a status quo was established with an extended touchdown marker on the runway.

Someone asked Don if he were ready to quit. "I've had about enough. Business is still good, but costs are going up faster than profits. The threat of these new regulations isn't exactly causing a mad rush to learn to fly either."

"I don't know. It isn't quite as bright-looking as it was when I started flying. But the field did last over fifty years. It doesn't seem such a long time, but look at it this way ... it's one-quarter of the life of our country."

Sterling Hubbard learned to fly in the '30s, flew for Pan Am in the seaplane days, and still flies a pre-war Aeronca. —Editor

SIKORSKY FLYING BOATS

Albert A. LeShane, Jr., Portland, CT

Just a note to express my appreciation for the excellent article "Sikorsky Flying Boats," by Ralph B. Lightfoot. While excellent articles aren't unusual in the *Journal*, this one is worthy of special mention because it calls attention to the engineering aspects of aviation history, a treatment which is unusual.

I believe it's important to present this perspective because it highlights the engineering approach used, by some pioneers, in the development of aviation. Too often, historical articles are presented, presumably because of perceived reader interest, in such a way as to lead the reader into thinking that early airplanes were just slapped together by trial and error methods. And far too many articles (mine included) relate only to tedious operational aspects of aviation (particularly military) or to long lists of aircraft serial numbers or some such which, while attesting to the persistence of the writer, have little in the way of interest for the historically minded reader.

In this article, Ralph Lightfoot combines a fascinating historical treatment of a subject of great interest with a technical exposition which is understandable to even a nontechnical reader. It's a perspective long overdue, and I hope it will serve as a prototype for similar articles in the future.

FLIGHT OF THE LIBERTY

James R. Wood, Bronxville, NY

Jens Johansen's "The Flight of the Liberty" (Vol. 24, No. 2) was most interesting. As a postscript, I might add that my research indicates that Otto Hillig received \$50,000 (in 1929 dollars!) in an out-of-court settlement from being "bumped" from the Graf Zeppelin's round-the-world flight. It seems that he paid \$25,000 for the right to make the trip and to take photographs. When he was barred from the flight, his lawyer had the airship attached and it was not allowed to leave Lakehurst until a \$50,000 bond was posted. On-board pictures of the Graf's flight, attributed to Robert Hartman and "courtesy of Hugo Eckener," may be found in the *National Geographic* magazine of June 1930, which has become a collector's item for zeppelin buffs such as myself.

DICK GRACE

Nick Pocock, Hillsboro, TX

Referring to "Dick Grace," by Bartlett Gould, Newburyport, Mass. (AAHS *Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 3, Fall 1979): In 1973 I mentioned to the late Frank Tallman that I had read *Crash Pilot* by Dick Grace and he said that the author was still living at that time, and I believe he said, in California. Although this has been six years ago, I hope it will be of some assistance, as I also hope that someone in California has, or will, research this subject more thoroughly. Good luck.