

The very first KLM Fokker put at the disposal of Van Lear Black, the F.VIIa H-NACT (c/n 4901) photographed here at Waalhaven airfield, south of Rotterdam. (KLM photo 500653)



The Advancement of Dutch Civil Aviation by an American Millionaire The Air Exploits of William Van Lear Black

by Theo Wesselink

In the last week of February 1927, the Hague office of the press bureau ANETA gave the news that an American, residing in London, had to go quickly to Cairo and back and had asked KLM¹ to convey him. His name was William Van Lear Black, owner of the newspaper, *Baltimore Sun*, and a few banks and mining companies.² Before the press agency broke this news, VLB had contacted Britain's largest airline company, IMPERIAL AIRWAYS, to place a suitable plane at his disposal, together with a crew to fly it, for the various trips he would like to make throughout Europe. These trips VLB intended to make were not just business calls, but he also wanted to see Europe and, perhaps later, the world. In his opinion, the best, fastest and most comfortable way to do this was by plane, not along the normal European air routes by a normal airliner, but by an airplane which would be entirely at his disposal. VLB was in a good position to do this because of the millions he had made with his various enterprises, so he was not just an ordinary tourist.

IMPERIAL AIRWAYS, however, did not run a taxi service in

addition to its airline operations and the request was turned down. Via a travel agency in London, Black was then advised to have a chat with Captain W. Hope, the owner of AIR TAXIS LTD. However, Hope did not have a suitable machine to offer with sufficient range and capacity, so Black passed the order on to the London representative of KLM. KLM's president and founder, Albert Plesman, liked the idea of taking this rich American anywhere he liked. Showing KLM's flag in this very special way should not be underestimated, he thought. Actually, Black had no business in Cairo at all, he merely wanted to fly to Egypt in order to surprise an American friend who was yachting there!

Apart from a KLM crew and full KLM service, Plesman put the Fokker F.VIIa H-NACT³ at VLB's disposal, which had been delivered to the airline towards the end of 1925 and was in fact the first of this type purchased by KLM. The crew was comprised of Capt. G.J. Geysendorffer, First Officer J. B. Scholte and Flight Engineer K.A.O. Weber. On 1 March 1927 they picked up VLB from Croydon airport near London, together with his inseparable valet Leo Bayline. On this first day they flew to

Versailles, where VLB looked around for a few hours while the Fokker was kept ready in order to leave at first notice. After Versailles they flew on to Neuremberg where they spent the night and moved on to Belgrade the next day. Black's first impressions were not altogether pleasant, because after landing in Belgrade he had to pay \$250 for each of the passengers and crew, because he had landed without having previously obtained permission. Then the hotel at Belgrade proved to be so unsavory that the flight to Cairo was abandoned and after a two-day stay at Belgrade, VLB returned to London the next day. However, Black understood that these Balkan incidents had nothing to do with aviation and he went on flying for several weeks at a time, over a period of several years, always using Fokker airplanes. During these four days, flying across half of Europe, Black covered 2500 miles and he was elated about this means of traveling.

A few weeks later, on the 24th of March, an almost endless series of trips, long and short, began which lasted for several months. Black began to like this flying more and more each day. This was a good opportunity to see something of the world and he wanted to take advantage of it. The AMERICAN EXPRESS COMPANY, which booked his hotels and cars by telegraph, had difficulty keeping pace and expected that reserved rooms and cars would not be used due to an emergency landing or some other delay. Almost everyone expected that sooner or later something would go wrong with this single-engined machine, but nothing of the sort happened. Day by day everything fitted perfectly and nothing could disrupt the steady progress of this first KLM air taxi. Almost any city with an airfield was visited:

DATE	CITIES VISITED	MILES
March 24	London—Dyon	360
March 25	Dyon—Marseille	290
March 26	Marseille—Naples	530
March 27	Aerial tour over Capri	
March 29	Aerial tour around and above the Vesuvius volcano	175
March 30	Naples—Paris	930
March 31	Paris—London	215
April 3	London—Paris—London	430
April 7	London—Liverpool—Glasgow	375
April 9	Glasgow—Liverpool—London	375
April 10	London—Amsterdam	250
April 12	Amsterdam—London	250
April 13	London—Rome	1080
April 17	Rome—London	1080
April 21	Aerial tour over London	85
April 23	Aerial tour over London	85
April 24	London—Paris—London	430
April 26	London—Southampton—London	170
April 27	London—Leipzig	600
April 30	Leipzig—London	600
May 1	London—St. Englevert—London	180
May 13	London—Rotterdam	220
May 15	Rotterdam—London	220
May 17	Croydon—Calais—Croydon	175
May 20	London—Paris	215
May 21	Paris—London	215
May 22	London—Farnborough—London	65
May 26	London—Neuremberg	600
May 28	Neuremberg—Leipzig	190
May 31	Leipzig—Dresden	65
May 31	Dresden—Vienna	250
June 2	Vienna—London	750
June 12	London—Glasgow	375
June 13	Glasgow—London	375
June 14	London—Amsterdam	250
Total		12,455



William Van Lear Black.

(Author's Collection)

Van Lear Black had really tasted air travel. Up to now all flights he had made were no more than some long hops. Now he wanted to make an extended long-distance flight. He too was elated by the enthusiasm which erupted after Lindbergh's solo flight across the Atlantic in May of that year, while he himself was busy covering more than twice that distance across Europe. One evening, while chatting with his pilots in the lobby of his hotel, he spoke of his future plans and the possibilities offered by air travel. He proposed reverse flight across the Atlantic, but Scholte considered such a trip too risky. He was supported by Plesman who only recently had furnished VLB with a brand-new F. Vila, the H-NADP⁴, delivered fresh from the Fokker factory to KLM and then through to VLB around the 25th of May. Instead of the reverse cross-Atlantic flight, Scholte proposed a flight to the Dutch East Indies, a scheme of which Plesman approved.

This Amsterdam to Batavia⁵ and return flight, which has rightly received a place in aviation history, would be the second such flight made by a KLM crew, using a KLM Fokker. The first flight was in the prototype F.VII H-NACC⁶ by A.J.N. Thomasen A. Thuessink van der Hoop, H. van Weerden Poelman and P.A. van den Broeke between 1 October and 24 November 1924. It was a one-way trip, the aircraft being shipped back to Holland, and succeeded only after many difficulties and hardships. For three years after this flight nothing happened concerning an airlink between Holland and the East Indies, mainly due to lack of a proper ground organization during the greater part of the route. Interest had to be reawakened in Holland and as it turned out, VLB was to be the man to initiate this interest. No one ever suspected a wealthy tourist would make preparations for such a flight. VLB, his crew and Plesman



First Pilot Geysendorffer.

(Author's Collection)



Second pilot Weber.

(Author's Collection)

set to work at once and on May 30, 1927, VLB and Plesman had agreed upon the terms under which the flight was to be made. VLB's flight was to be the first intercontinental charter flight in history, but it would not be a smooth pleasure trip but a tiring journey with more than one narrow escape en route. Thousands of miles were to be covered with this single-engined plane at a time when no proper ground organization, no weather information service and no radio facilities were available. The airfields were mainly soggy or of loose earth and rather small. These hardships had to be faced twice, because it was going to be a round trip.

The Amsterdam to Batavia and Return Flight, June 15-July 23, 1927

On the morning of July 15, 1927, H-NADP, fitted with a 450-hp, Gnome-Rhone "Jupiter" IV engine, was ready for takeoff from the platform of Schiphol airport near Amsterdam. Not only was the plane thoroughly checked out by the Fokker company, but also the standard cabin interior, consisting of eight seats, two abreast, had been removed and replaced by four comfortable chairs and a small table. Also three instead of two 77 Imp. gallon tanks were installed, which gave the plane a range of 1000-1100 miles under favorable conditions or a 12-hour endurance. No other standard passenger airplane could compete with that performance in those days. The morning of departure there was a storm blowing, but nevertheless Geysendorffer took off for the first leg of this 19,000-mile round trip, which would take VLB and company to Budapest, Hungary. Almost right after takeoff, the main source of trouble that would be met on this flight, developed: the Jupiter engine.

After arriving at Budapest that night it was discovered that some inlet valves had burned due to a poor fuel mixture, which in turn was caused by the carburetor setting, which needed constant readjustment. After this first leg, Flight Engineer Weber had his hands full and it was not going to be the last time he

would be very busy. The flight across the Balkan to Istanbul, starting early in the morning of the next day, was marked by fine weather and a favorable wind, but soon the engine spoiled the fun again. An hour before they were due to arrive at Istanbul, a rocker arm got stuck, so Geysendorffer had to continue on eight cylinders. After their arrival Weber knew what he had to do.

Taking a day's rest, everything seemed to be in order for the next leg, from Istanbul to Aleppo in northwest Syria, about 75 miles from the Turkish border. But while underway, even before reaching the Taurus range along the south coast of Turkey, they were in trouble again. This time the inlet tube of a cylinder was cracked, therefore receiving a poor fuel mixture with the by now well-known consequences: the valves burned. The weather was bad as well, also Geysendorffer had to climb a few thousand feet in order to cross the mountains. The Aleppo-Bagdad (Iraq) stretch was completed in fine weather and fortunately no difficulties arose.

Shortly after leaving Bagdad the next day, however, a malfunction in the oil system developed, necessitating an emergency landing at the British military airfield near Hanaidi in southern Iraq. Weber checked over the engine for hours, but was unable to find the trouble. A test flight proved that it ran properly again, but 15 minutes after takeoff the oil supply failed again and Geysendorffer returned to Hanaidi. During the daytime the heat was unbearable and Weber fainted twice during his inspection, while being assisted by an English private who volunteered his services. The inspection continued all through the night and in the morning the engine ran smoothly once more and the trip was continued to Bandar Abbas in southern Persia on the Gulf of Oman, with a favorable wind. On this leg the occupants of the Fokker, flying at an altitude of some 8,000 feet, saw the yellow clouds of various sandstorms beneath them. Next day, under variable weather conditions, the Bandar Abbas-Karachi (then still in India) leg was completed. One time, when the

machine was struggling against strong headwinds, Geysendorffer flew low, but in doing so ended up in a sandstorm, limiting visibility to almost zero.

After landing at Drigh Road military airfield near Karachi, the entire plane had to be cleaned of sand, the oil had to be replenished, a rocker arm had to be replaced, all flying wires had to be tightened again, the taillight had to be fixed and a hole in the wing, probably caused by a rock during takeoff or landing, had to be repaired. At Drigh Road, for the first time since leaving Budapest, the Fokker could be properly stored in a hangar. The crossing of India, from Karachi to Calcutta, did not pose any difficulties, but after taking off from Calcutta for Rangoon, Burma, however, H-NADP met the first spearheads of the notorious wet westerly monsoon. The monsoon became even worse on the Rangoon-Bangkok, Siam, leg. Heavy rainfall from low-hanging clouds forced Geysendorffer to fly as near the ground as possible, so the occupants of the plane had to contend with heavy rains, jerking them up and down and from side to side. The pilots almost had to feel their way through the coastal mountain range on the way to Bangkok. Then, suddenly the oil malfunction developed again and, above the mountains, this could be fatal. That is why the Fokker turned back to the coast again. When it emerged from the clouds, only a few dozen yards above the surface of the Indian Ocean, it was clear that an emergency landing along the coast was as impossible as in the mountains. The situation became critical and Geysendorffer risked a last attempt to try to smooth the running of the unruly engine. He eased the throttle forward and . . . it worked! Carefully the plane spiralled upwards until another mountain crossing could be attempted and this time they succeeded; without further mishap they reached Bangkok. VLB would remember this part of the trip for a long time to come! At Bangkok's Don Muang airfield, Weber again checked out the engine, but again he failed to locate the trouble. However, the consequences were very clear: various cylinders and other engine parts had to be replaced. At long last Weber posed the assumption that the trouble must have been due to an air lock in the oil pump, which therefore was unable to pump the oil from the engine back to the reservoir. It remained an assumption, however.

Had Don Muang been soaked by the tropical rains, the emergency landing field at Sengora, southern Siam, their next stop, was even worse. At some places the surface had become so soggy that, in addition to the 450 horses of the Jupiter, another 60 rope-pulling coolies were needed to tow the Fokker to dryer ground for takeoff, which went all but smoothly. Only a short distance from the field's boundary the plane left the ground, but entire branches of the surrounding trees got stuck between the undercarriage and the tail struts. After arriving at Singapore it was discovered that these branches had bent the tail struts considerably out of place. The field at Singapore was so small that landing there, over tall trees and houses, may be called a true piece of art. A takeoff from this field would be out of the question and it was decided, after repairing the tail struts, to unload all luggage and non-vital spare parts and send them to Batavia by boat. Geysendorffer would then take off alone and fly to the nearby race course, which offered a better takeoff opportunity, and VLB and the other members of his party would board the plane again. In this way, the takeoff from Singapore presented no danger at all and was the last daylight leg begun. Via Muntok, on the eastern tip of Bangka, a small island off the

east coast of Sumatra, where a refueling stop was made, the plane flew on to Batavia. During this last part of the voyage, heavy rains and headwinds were encountered above southern Sumatra and western Java, so that the maximum flying altitude was reduced to 600 feet. At about five o'clock in the afternoon of June 30, H-NADP, after a trip of 13 days during which a distance of 9120 miles was covered in 86 hours and 27 minutes' flying time, landed at Tjililitan airfield at Meester Cornells, a suburb of Batavia on the island Java. The first commercial flight from Holland to the East Indies had been completed.

There would not be much rest on Java for the party. Next day Geysendorffer took the Fokker to nearby Andir airfield near Bandung, a military field, where mechanics of the Luchtvaart Afdeling (Army Aviation Branch) carried out a thorough inspection and readied the plane for the homeward journey, starting from Batavia on the morning of July 6. The flight did not begin without the usual engine trouble. When it was turned over for takeoff, all spark plugs turned out to be greased up without any traceable cause. So these had to be cleaned first, before VLB was able to think of leaving the East Indies. When this was finished, the party was able to leave for Medan on northern Sumatra without further mishaps, where Geysendorffer landed on the race course. In this way Singapore, with its unfavorable airfield, could be avoided.

The unhappy experience at Sengora still in mind, Geysendorffer and Scholte wanted to fly to Bangkok the next day in one long haul, and that is why they left Medan very early. It remained a good intention only, for again the engine failed to cooperate. Hardly had they crossed the Strait of Malakka when one of the cylinders gave up again due to the greased-up spark plugs. Of course Sengora was the only landing field around, so nothing else could be done but to land the plane there. Weber still could not discover the cause of the trouble and as soon as the engine ran smoothly again, the travelers decided to fly on to Bangkok. But only one-and-a-half hours after leaving Sengora the Fokker landed there again, this time with a couple of broken rocker arms and a damaged valve opener. Before this trouble could be fixed, it had become too late to think about a flight to Bangkok and so the party had to stay and spend the night in not-very-hospitable Sengora.

Next day the trip to Bangkok did not pose any difficulties, but arriving over Don Muang airfield, this turned out to have changed into a small lake. VLB, who had been so imprudent as to leave a cabin window open during landing, was now covered with a thick layer of mud. The delay of one day at Bangkok supplied Weber—who certainly could not say he was on a joy ride—with an opportunity to give the Jupiter a thorough check-over. While doing this, all sorts of malfunctions showed up, e.g., the diffuser holes of the carburetor turned out to be choked up. Of course the takeoff from Don Muang was everything but easy. Only the last moment the machine was able to suck itself loose from the marshes. Also the trip to Rangoon, crossing the Burma coastal range, the most difficult of all trajectories, was far from pleasant. Low-hanging clouds and heavy rains put a heavy strain on the pilots' nerves. After arriving at Rangoon again a rocker arm of one of the cylinders had bent.

On the Rangoon-Calcutta leg the monsoon posed a lot of difficulties, forcing the plane to fly about a hundred feet above the sea most of the time. Fortunately the engine held out, like it did on the next leg, from Calcutta to Allahabad, halfway between



Calcutta and Delhi. However, between Allahabad and Karachi, reaching the sandstorm areas, the mysterious oil malfunction developed again. By now the pilots knew how to handle this trouble: by putting the plane in a slight dive and carefully accelerating the throttle, the Jupiter ran properly again. At Karachi the entire oil supply was replaced due to the sand, another cylinder replaced and next day the party moved on to Bandar Abbas. Arriving there it was discovered that the rear cover of the oil reservoir had loosened up, which again caused Weber a lot of work and this in a stifling heat in which even a person with nothing to do had the greatest difficulty not to faint.

Next day VLB intended to fly to Bagdad, but near Basra, however, at the mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the plane ended up in such a heavy sandstorm that visibility was reduced to zero. Nothing else could be done but to turn back. After retreating their steps for over two hours, H-NADP landed at the emergency airfield near Bandar Dilem, a vast plain as far as the eye could see, without even the slightest form of accommodation. The heat was still terrible and the party had to take cover in the shade of the plane. Fortunately the population in a nearby village turned out to be very hospitable so the air travelers were able that night, sitting on small Persian carpets, to enjoy a meal of chicken and rice, before taking a short night's rest beneath the starry oriental sky.

They left Bandar Dilem very early, but this day too they would not reach Bagdad. The inescapable sandstorms were still howling above the Tigris and Euphrates area and the occupants of the Fokker considered themselves lucky they were able to land at Basra. During the landing one of the tires blew, fortunately without causing any accidents. For four days the sandstorms kept VLB and his party down at Basra, days which were used by Weber not only to completely overhaul the engine, but the entire plane.

As soon as the sandstorms blew themselves out, they took off from Basra, stopped for fuel at Bagdad and flew on to Aleppo

Black's Fokker F.VIIb/3m, photographed on one of the three winter days—note the melting snow heaps—during which the plane was supposed to carry the Dutch registration -ADP (c/n 5105), from 29 January to 1 February 1929. From this latter date on, all Dutch civil aircraft had to carry the new Dutch recognition letters PH- instead of H-N. Apparently the painter wasn't very well acquainted yet with the new lettering, applying P-HADP instead of PH-ADP. The car in front of the plane is probably Black's.
(KLM photo 520803)

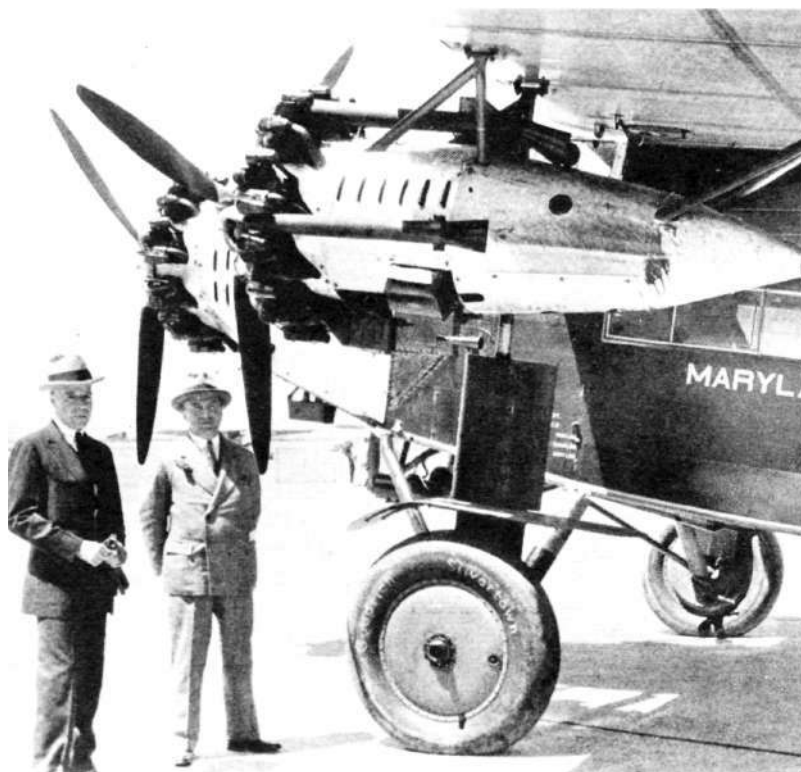
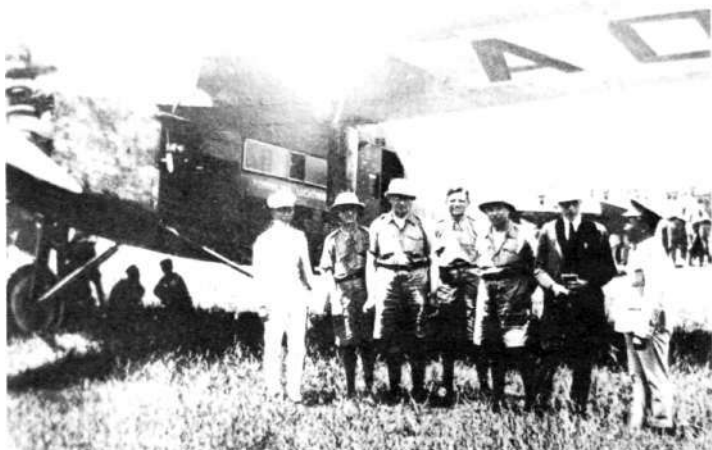
and from there across the Taurus range to Istanbul the next day. During takeoff from Aleppo, Weber noticed something was wrong with the right-hand undercarriage wheel. A small puff of smoke rose from the axle and after that the wheel started wobbling around it. Weber warned Geysendorffer at once and the latter executed the landing at Istanbul with the utmost carefulness. This was for the better, for an inspection revealed that the sand had worn the axle entirely away. After this trouble was cured, next day they were able to complete the longest leg of the entire trip, the 1370 miles between Istanbul and Neuremberg, including a fuel stop at Budapest. This distance was covered in 13.5 hours' flying time in weather conditions that varied between sunshine and a favorable wind to vicious thunderstorms and rain. After arriving at Neuremberg everything seemed to be in perfect order, but while preparing for takeoff the next day for the last leg to Amsterdam, the engine did not run smoothly. The usual remedy, cleaning and changing spark plugs, did not do any good. After a thorough inspection, which lasted over an hour, Weber at long last discovered that the insulation of a spark plug cable had burned away on the exhaust pipe of the engine, causing a short circuit. When this was cured, the party could finally begin the last leg, which proved to be just as difficult as most of the previous ones with rain and a thunderstorm causing considerable delay. And so it was not until 4:48 P.M. in the afternoon of July 23, 1927, that Geysendorffer put H-NADP down at Schiphol airport. The return journey had taken 14 days, during which 9590 miles were covered in 97 hours' flying time. The extra 470 miles of the return flight in comparison with the outward flight were caused by the detour via Medan and the turning back because of the sandstorms near Basra. The average

flying speed had been about 100 mph, or a little less than 6 mph less than on the flight to Batavia, caused mainly by the almost constant headwinds. At Schiphol, VLB and his party were received by a crowd of several thousand, an unforgettable welcome.

The Effects of VLB's Flight to the Dutch East Indies on Dutch Civil Aviation

This long flight proved to all concerned with Dutch civil aviation that the Fokker plane had functioned perfectly during the entire trip and that the crew had been perfectly capable of performing such a heavy and difficult task. KLM now knew that with the existing, although still imperfect, ground organization in Asia, an air link with Java would be possible, but only when using multi-engined airliners like the Fokker F.VII/3m. Only the engine, known to pilots all over Europe by the classical epithet *Tonans* (thunder), because of the noise it produced, did not live up to expectations. It must be said that, even in those days, when aircraft engines were still far from perfect, this example showed an extraordinary amount of trouble. The general public, which did not get to know much about the problems of the JUPITER, saw this first passenger flight to the East Indies as a revelation of the possibility of a regular air link with the overseas possessions and became absolutely wild about it. And this was VLB's greatest service: he set a personal example and awoke the Dutch from their three-year-long sleep as far as an air link with the East Indies was concerned. That same year a second Amsterdam-to-Batavia and return flight was made, this time by Lt. G.A. Koppen, Captain; G.M.H. Frijs, First Officer and S. Elleman, Flight Engineer. All three of them served in the Dutch Army Air Service (L.V.A.). In 1920 Koppen had twice planned a flight to the East Indies, first using an Albatross C.XV and later the only Fokker F.V., but neither trip was ever made, due to various circumstances. Now, in 1927, Koppen again was preparing an East Indies flight, using the KLM-Fokker F.VIIb/3m POSTUIF (*Carrier Pigeon*). It took a long time to raise enough funds, however, and VLB reached the Indies before Koppen, who left Schiphol on October 1st and returned on the 28th. Now nothing was holding KLM back from starting an airline. In September 1928, a series of test flights was made, which was repeated the next year, followed in 1930 by a twice-monthly service, the longest route airline in the world at that time.

Van Lear Black and his party, photographed at Don Muang airfield at Bangkok, Siam, in front of the Fokker F.VIIa H-NADP. From left to right: Siamese officer, Leo Bayline, Scholte, Weber, Geysendorffer, Van Lear Black and another Siamese officer. (Author's Collection)



Van Lear Black (left) with—probably—Leo Bayline in front of the first *Maryland Free State*, the Fokker F.VIIa/3m H-NADP. (Thijs Postma collection)

Other Famous Flights by Van Lear Black

After the flight to the East Indies, VLB still flew thousands of miles throughout Europe with his party, using the same Fokker, until the end of September 1927. Including the long-distance flight, in 1927 he covered a total distance of 44,200 miles! After staying in the United States for a few months to take care of his accumulated business affairs, he came back to Europe for further travels, this time with a Fokker F.VIIa/3m⁷. The plane was powered by three Gnome-Rhone *Titan* engines and carried the same registration as his previous plane: H-NADP, *MARYLAND FREE STATE*⁸. In May 1928, VLB started out for a flight to Capetown, but en route to Khartoum the aircraft developed wing flutter to such an extent that it strained the wing and the journey had to be abandoned. Until mid-August, Black, with his regular crew, flew a little over 23,600 miles.⁹ The Fokker factory built a new aircraft for him, powered by three Wright J.6 *Whirlwind* engines. This time it was an F.VIIb/3m, again registered as H-NADP, but soon thereafter it became G-AADZ.¹⁰ Like its predecessor it was also called the *MARYLAND FREE STATE*.

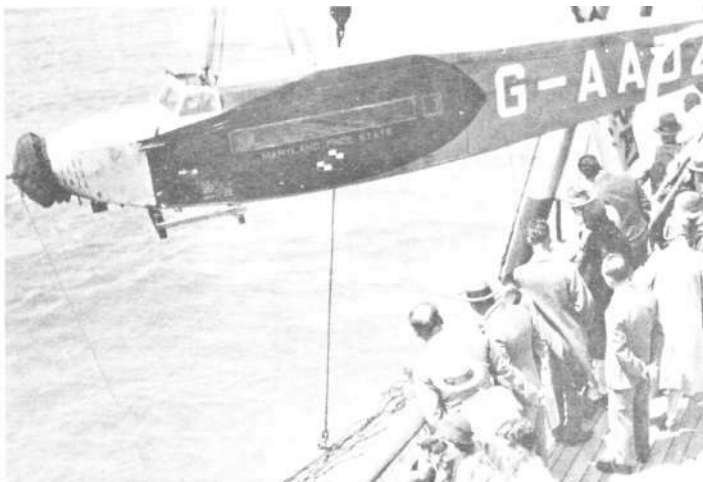
The flights with this aircraft were no longer under KLM's flag, however, but were arranged by Black himself. He had founded a British company, VAN LEAR BLACK LTD., of which G-AADZ became one of the assets. The legal aspects of this accorded him considerable facilities when flying across territories under British mandate or administration. The pilots Geysendorffer and Scholte left KLM and joined VLB in permanent employment, with another mechanic. At the beginning of the 1929 "flying season" during February and March, a journey from Croydon to Capetown and back was made. On the journey home, VLB again experienced engine trouble. When over the Ligurian Sea, one of the valves of the port engine broke into a cylinder. Since full-feathering propellers were not then in use, the three-bladed propeller caused further damage to the engine. The vibration

The prototype Koolhoven FK 43 PH-AFW (c/n 4301) at Waalhaven airfield. It was designed and built along the wishes of William Van Lear Black.
(Historisch Topografische Atlas, Gemeentelijke Archiefdienst, Amsterdam, negative number 264)



The arrival of the *Maryland Free State* number three at the airfield at Tokyo.
(Author's Collection)

The fuselage of the *Maryland Free State* number three G-AADZ being hoisted aboard an American Pacific steamer in Tokyo, bound for San Francisco.
(Thijs Postma collection)



PH-AKD (c/n 4309), one of the nine FK 43s which served KLM as air taxis until 1940. In the background the only Fokker F.XXXVI PH-AJA.
(Thijs Postma Collection)

became so heavy that Geysendorffer made a forced landing on the beach near San Remo. A new engine was quickly sent from America. On that journey VLB flew 16,200 miles. He realized he was doing pioneering work and remained enthusiastic. Setbacks did not disturb his pleasure.

On June 10, 1929, the *MARYLAND FREE STATE* left Croydon for a flight to Tokyo. At Dum-Dum airfield at Calcutta the aircraft, having to be left in the open, was staked down. During the night a gale raged and when, early in the morning, the air mechanic arrived at the airfield, the plane had disappeared. All

that was left were the mooring cables with little pieces of plywood on them. The plane was lying on its back behind a wall some 30 yards away. Black was not discouraged. He returned to England, where his insurance company presented him with a new aircraft, another Fokker F.VIIb/3m and again registered as G-AADZ MARYLAND FREE STATE.¹¹ During 1929 VLB covered a total distance of 44,200 miles. In February 1930 he again left Croydon for Tokyo, which was reached in early April via Cairo, India and China. That was another 12,860 miles. From Tokyo the plane was then shipped to San Francisco and flown across the entire United States to Baltimore, VLB's hometown. According to the log book of G-AADZ, which was found by a book lover, browsing at one of the bookstalls in Amsterdam, its last flight was made at the end of July 1930, when the Dutch crew ferried the plane from Baltimore to the American Fokker works at Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey, for a major overhaul.¹²

Van Lear Black's Koolhoven FK 43

No doubt the relation between VLB and the Koolhoven FK 43 high-winged cabin monoplane is one of the least-known facets of the various ventures of this truly great American aviation pioneer.¹³ During late 1929 Black was searching for a private airplane of smaller dimensions than the Fokker airliners. Because of his high opinion of Dutch aviation in general he decided to order the aircraft he had in mind in Holland as well. At that time the Dutch Fokker factory was only concerned with military aircraft and airliners and had never built a light plane for civilian use only. At that time the only other aircraft manufacturing company of some importance was the Koolhoven factory at Waalhaven airfield near Rotterdam, and that is where VLB went. Frits Koolhoven, owner and designer of the works, already had had a lot of experience building light planes and to him VLB outlined his thoughts and wishes on what the plane he wanted should be like. Koolhoven went to work at once and designed what was to be his FK 43 model, a three-seat, high-winged cabin monoplane. Early in 1930 he showed the drawings to VLB, who liked the plane very much and decided to order it.

While construction of the plane was underway, mid-August 1930 a message was received that VLB had disappeared from his yacht while cruising off the coast of New Jersey. In all probability he fell overboard and was drowned. At the time of his death VLB was 55 years old. Construction of the FK 43 went ahead, however, and the machine made its first flight early in 1931. It received the registration PH-AFW and was transported shortly afterwards to France to serve as a production example for Baxter Aviation, which intended to build the type under license. The firm got into financial difficulties, however, and nothing ever came of the idea. Registered as F-ALPO the plane had a rather obscure career in France. Koolhoven built 12 FK 43s in all, nine of which went into service with KLM as air taxis.

NOTES

1. KLM: Koninklijke Luchtvaart Maatschappij/Royal Dutch Airlines.
2. Black was a resident of Baltimore, Md., but had put up office temporarily in London.
3. H-NACT: c/n 4901, registered from 2 October 1925 to 4 June 1940 to KLM. Destroyed by German bombs at Schiphol airport, 10 May 1940. At the Dutch National Air and Space Museum "Avidome" at Schiphol airport an original F.VIIa is still to be seen in KLM colors, registered as H-NACT. Of course this is not the original plane, but c/n 5054, ex CH-159 of Balair, Switzerland, ex OY-DED and ex SE-ASE, flown (!) to Schiphol in December 1955 and put on display as VLB's H-NACT.
"Overzicht van de in het Nederlandse register voor luchtvaartuigen ingeschreven vliegtuigen en ballonnen over de periode 1920-1945," published by the Royal Dutch Aero Club, Aviation History Branch, The Hague, around the

- middle 1960s. Hereinafter called "Overzicht."
4. H-NADP: c/n 4990, registered from 23 May 1927 to 28 April 1928 to KLM. Overzicht.
 5. Batavia was the capital of the Dutch East Indies. Since 1949 it has been called Jakarta.
 6. H-NACC: c/n 4759 (4832 ?), registered from 17 June 1924 to 20 July 1926. Crashed near Wolverthem, England, 9 July 1926. Overzicht.
 7. There is some information that this plane was an F.VIIb/3m, but this doesn't show in the official records.
 8. The subsequent history of the Fokker aircraft used by VLB is rather confusing, unless the c/n's are sharply observed. After being registered as H-NADP (see note 4), c/n 4990—VLB's famous F.VIIa—re-registered as H-NADR from 28 April 1928 to 14 December 1931 to KLM. This latter registration was taken from the F.VIIa c/n 4992, also from KLM and registered from 7 April 1927 to 28 April 1928, after which it became the new H-NADP after being rebuilt to F.VIIa/3m by Fokker. So, the two planes just changed registrations. The original H-NADP—the one used for the flight to the Indies and re-registered H-NADR—would serve KLM for a long time. From 14 December 1931 to 9 November 1936 it was again re-registered, as PH-OTO, and served as a photographic survey plane. From 9 November 1936 to 21 June 1939 it was again re-registered, now as PH-ALY, the -OTO registration being transferred to the Fokker F.VIII c/n 5045 which took over the F.VIIa's duties with KLM. In the summer of 1939 the plane was sold to Aalborg Luftfahrt in Denmark as OY-DEV, transferred to the Dansk Arbejdsgeverforening (Danish Labour Union) and sold to the Finnish Red Cross on 8 November 1941 receiving the serial FE-2. Its subsequent fate is unknown. Overzicht.
 9. The subsequent history of this second H-NADP is as much confusing as was the first. Originally it was registered to KLM from 28 April 1928 to 18 December of that same year, first as an F.VIIa/3m in which guise it was used by VLB—and later as an F.VIIb. This came about because, after VLB returned the plane to KLM after the 1928 "flying season"—still as a trimotor!—KLM ordered Fokker to rebuild the machine as an F.VIIb in which form the plane kept the registration H-NADP until 18 December 1928. Hereafter the machine was brought back to its original F.VIIa standard—see note 8—in KLM's own workshop and so the circle was complete: F.VIIa—F.VIIa/3m—F.VIIb—and F.VIIa again. It now received the c/n KLM-4 and the registration PH-AET, the Dutch H-N letters having been changed to PH- early in 1929. After all this the plane still had a very long service career and was scrapped in 1961. Overzicht.
 10. For the third time a VLB Fokker was registered as H-NADP, although for a very short time, from 29 January 1929 to 1 February to KLM. The c/n was 5105 and it soon became G-AADZ. Overzicht.
 11. C/n 5195; in Holland registered to the Fokker factory as PH-AGP from 20 to 29 January 1929. Overzicht.
 12. Apparently the British registration lapsed, for in 1931 the plane was sold to Balair, Switzerland, as CH-165, becoming HB-LAN of Swissair in October 1934. In August 1935 it was sold to Ala Littoria, Italy, as I-UEBI. Overzicht.
 13. Interview with ir. C.A. van der Eyk, former chief of the Koolhoven drawing department from 1931-1940. 19 April 1975.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For the past five years Theo Wesseiink (25) had made an extensive study of the life and designs of Holland's pre-WW II second large aircraft manufacturer. Frits Koolhoven. A small piece of this study, about the B.A.T. FK 23 "Bantam" II fighter biplane, was published in the Spring 1977 Journal. During his research he stumbled over the fact that Koolhoven's FK 43 cabin monoplane was designed and built along the wishes of William Van Lear Black. Because VLB was very popular in Dutch aviation circles at the time, the author's interest in this American was reawakened and he decided to dig up more information about his air exploits, resulting in the above article. The author, together with his wife Corrie and their children, lives in Haarlem, Holland. Apart from a number of articles on his pet subject, Koolhoven, he recently translated Robert Jackson's "Aerial Combat" into Dutch and writes articles on general aviation affairs for several local newspapers. He also wrote a few small books in Dutch about WW II fighters and the fighter aircraft of the Dutch Air Force from 1913-1978. At the moment he is preparing a book on the designs of Frits Koolhoven. Mr. Wesseiink studied instrumentation engineering after which he joined the Dutch/German ESTEL steel concern in 1972. In October 1978 he left and joined the Unieboek publishing concern where he became assistant manager of its "Erato" sales division.

