

NEWS & COMMENT

FROM OUR MEMBERS

VS-44's AND ARMS

Don Thomas, Dunedin, FL

Re: Charles Blair's letter to Mr. Sullivan on the VS-44s: While flying as a flight radio operator for Skyways International, I heard stories of its VS-44 which flew into the River Plate at night while flying arms to the Paraguayan rebels. Only the flight engineer survived; he was found clinging to a piece from the wreck. Apparently the loss affected the airline severely in a financial way; when it folded a few years later, there were five Skyways C-46 aircraft parked on the airfield at Rome, Italy. Five of us crews took one of them for a return flight home to Miami, dropping one crew off in Paris to fly for another charter airline.

While in Rome for a few weeks waiting for a charter we always had an Italian-American character hanging around us in the hotel lobbies for friendly conversation; probably a spy from the American Embassy or the Italians or Russians. One day, soon after our arrival, he asked me if we had arms aboard. I replied yes, we had "arms" aboard when we arrived. He scooted away promptly to report. (Our pilot was Captain Arms of Connecticut.)

P-39s TO RUSSIA

Harry F. Kelsey, Woodland Hills, CA

I read with interest Deane Brandon's review of "Flight Manual for P-39 Aircobra" by Leo J. Kohn in the second quarter newsletter.

I worked in the aerodynamic group at Bell from December 1942 to June 1944 at which time I entered the Navy. I can substantiate the reviewer's point that a great many of the P-39s we gave to the Soviet Union were flown to the Soviet Union via the Montana-Canada-Alaska route. The Soviets had a contingent of acceptance pilots at Bell who supposedly flew all the aircraft earmarked for lend-lease and these aircraft were then flown from Niagara Falls to Montana.

Bell sent George Ray, one of the lead men in the structures group, to the Soviet Union in 1943 to be an advisor to the Soviets on the P-39, particularly concerning any changes they made. I talked to George after he returned. He said the Soviets considered the P-39 to have only one mission, a tank destroyer, and that they stripped the delivered aircraft of all equipments not consistent with a low-level, short-range, close-support mission. George said they took out all survival gear, all but the primary radio and all redundant batteries. He reported seeing piles of these equipments at the field where he was. While I can't verify the number of aircraft delivered via the ALSIB route, I do know that a goodly number were flown over this route with George Ray at the Siberian end for part of the time.

Bell developed a gigantic centerline mounted belly tank for the P-39 I believe for the express purpose of giving the aircraft ferry range consistent with the route from Montana to Alaska. I can't remember the size of this tank although the number 350 gallons keeps coming to mind. A humorous story was circulated around Bell concerning the flight test of this tank. It seems the project pilot, father of a new baby boy, six-foot something and over 200 pounds, flew an extended range test from Niagara Falls to a turnaround point near Florida, ran out of oxygen, had to abandon his cruise altitude and came back to the Falls with voided test data. Chief Pilot Bob Stanley, he of the notorious temper, flew the same test a few days later, ran out of fuel and had to land at Binghamton. Back at Bell, Stanley accused the project pilot of having been lost and nowhere near the correct range and why did he run out of oxygen while he, Stanley, ran out of fuel. When the project pilot reminded Stanley that he had a son and Stanley had a daughter, Stanley fired him. Higher powers got into the act and the man was rehired but we all had a laugh at another of Stanley's temper tantrums.

COVER PAINTINGS FOR SALE

Robert E. Forrest, Sabina, OH

I would like to enter my vote with Jack Kennedy of Columbia, Mo., whose letter appeared in the Summer issue of the *AAHS Journal* 1982, that AAHS make extra copies of the *Journal* back cover paintings on extra wraparound covers to be run at the same time as the *Journals* to provide extra copies at a nominal cost during production runs.

Would one dollar per cover be enough postpaid or what would be a nominal cost? The idea sounds like a real winner to me. I for one would support the idea. Let's hear more about it!

J.O. Spragge, Williamsville, NY

Regarding Jack Kennedy's letter in Vol. 27, No. 2, yes, I would like to see reprints of the cover paintings and photos. His idea of offering extra covers seems like a good one. Perhaps they could be subscribed to on a yearly basis, and sent along with the *Journal*.

Prints advertised in various mags are getting a bit out of line and often are repetitious in their choice of subjects, so please give Jack's idea more consideration.

George L. Ardwin, Sabina, OH

Concerning the letter from Jack Kennedy in Vol. 27, No. 2. I would indeed be interested in having prints of some of the cover paintings. However, they must be available at a reasonable price. I am not looking for collectors' prints that are signed by the artist and sell for a high price.

If prints are made available, please put me on your mailing list.

Raymond D. Berkheimer, York, PA

In reply to the editor's note about the letter by Jack Kennedy in the Summer 1982 "News

& Comment."

I would also like to see cover paintings available. Any method used for their sale should show a small profit for the society.

Colin H. Kidd, Hackensack, NJ

Regarding *Journal* cover paintings suggested by Jack Kennedy, I am all for it and would be a supporter!

P.S. Summer issue of the *Journal* superb! Good "mix."

Ed Kerey, Linden, NJ

Journal cover paintings available? (Ref. Jack Kennedy in Summer 1982 *Journal*.) Please give this consideration.

Jerry Marlette, Indianapolis, IN

With regard to the suggestion by Jack Kennedy in the Summer *Journal*, by all means make available the rear covers for framing!

These are some of the best art work done in years, and should be framed and hung rather than just being filed way back on the shelves or in the closet.

I can just see that P-6E on my wall now!

STEARMAN NOSTALGIA

Ben Donahue, Mountain View, CA

Re: "The Square Tail Stearman":

Authors Lowe and Wilson's coverage of the Model 4 is the usual superb *Journal* presentation.

I used to hang around the "old Union Terminal," now Hollywood Burbank. My fantasy was to be in the cockpit of the very beautiful Model 4 that Richfield Oil Co. had stationed at Union. Her blue and yellow color scheme and eagle logo on the sides was my airplane. The gentleman who flew her was also the manager of Union. His name escapes me. (Maybe someone out there remembers?)

Richfield also possessed a Northrop *Delta* or *Gamma*. That I had the good fortune to get a ride in one time.

I was a member of a small group of high-school guys who were all motivated toward aviation, called the Air Cadets of America. We as a group met once a month and assisted at different air shows, doing little jobs for the sponsors, just to really have front-row seats. Richfield was great. The Model 4 and the Northrop were on static display or did fly-bys, letting people see those great aircraft.

A great many events changed the area around the old terminal. I began work at Lockheed and lost track of my airplane. I do remember a picture shown in the local papers. The Union manager and his son posed in front of the Model 4. I may be entirely wrong. John Underwood, are you reading this?

Keep up the outstanding work.

N&C COMMENTS

L.L. Walker, Jr., Houston, TX

There are two items in your "News & Comment" column of the Summer 1982 issue to

which I should like to make response.

Mr. Merle C. Olmsted comments on the propellers used on the U.S. Navy NC-1 flying boat. Richard K. Smith, in his exhaustive study of the U.S. Navy's Transatlantic Flight of 1919, *First Across*, reports in some detail on the propeller problems encountered by these aircraft. The Olmsted propellers—which are indeed the ones shown in the illustration—were more efficient, but suffered from tip cracking problems. Smith tells in some detail of the decision which led to American Propeller Company [*sic*] of Baltimore manufacturing and shipping 12 oak propellers in some 48 hours.

I commend Mr. Smith's book to the attention of Mr. Olmsted and others interested in this subject.

My second comment concerns a letter from Mr. Jack McRae concerning the Wright Brothers' first flight.

The gentleman speaks of "the recurring theme that the Wright Brothers allegedly used a catapult for takeoff assistance on their 1903 flights." According to Orville Wright's own account of the first flight at Kitty Hawk, as quoted by Fred C. Kelly in his book, *The Wright Brothers*, the authorized biography of the two men, the aircraft made an unassisted takeoff from a track, into a head wind of between 9 and 10 meters per second.

However, Mr. Kelly tells us: "Before their experiments had progressed far in 1904 the Wrights saw that a better method of launching the machine was needed," and he then describes in some detail the derrick catapult, some version of which was thereafter used by the Wrights for launching.

The flights at Kitty Hawk used no catapult. Beginning in 1904, and thereafter, the derrick catapult seems to have been used regularly.

BELLANCA TYPE 77-140

Warren D. Shipp, San Diego, CA

Merle Olmsted, page 254, re: Bellanca Type 77-140. Olmsted states "interesting type taken locally," and credit for photos by the late Haney. The "Colombian Bombers" as we called them, and there were two of them, were located for a period of time at North Beach (not Branch) Airport, which is now LaGuardia Field. The writer is quite familiar with the backgrounds appearing in the photos. Am including four photos of these Bellancas in approximately the same spot on the field as the ones Olmsted contributed. Two photos show one that burned, apparently in a flash fire so fast in its consumption of fabric that it appears that the wood framework is hardly damaged. If indeed Haney traveled to the East Coast in 1936, it is possible he took the photos, otherwise he obtained them in trade, and were therefore in fact taken by one of the East Coast photographers with which he traded.

This should be of interest to Mr. Bill Thompson of Beecher, Illinois, who, in Vol. 27, No. 2, Summer 1982 "News & Comment" letter with respect to the Sikorsky S-43s and Mr. Haney's collection which he

acquired 11 years ago. Mr. Thompson should be aware that it is possible that a number of the negatives in Mr. Haney's collection were not taken by him but were obtained through trading negatives with other collectors of the time. It is unfortunate that Mr. Haney obviously did not include the photographer's names on the envelopes containing negatives obtained in the trading process. The writer is likewise guilty of similar omissions due to ignorance early in his career, as indicated in my discourse regarding credit lines.

VOLUME 26, NUMBER 2, SUMMER 1981

Warren D. Shipp, San Diego, CA

Re: *The Biography of A. Francis Arcier* by G. Allison Long, Jr., page 136:

"Model 102-A *Aristocrat*. . . Admiral Byrd used one for his first Antarctic Expedition."

Despite repeated advertising by General Airplanes Corporation of Buffalo, N.Y., at the time, the subject aircraft was *not* used by Byrd at the Antarctic, in fact, did not reach there at all. Following is a quote from a letter from Janet L. Shaw, Research Correspondence, National Geographic Society, dated 11 April 1979: "The General Airplanes Corporation of Buffalo gave its first production model of the *Aristocrat* to Admiral Byrd. The plane was shipped to Norfolk, boxed and put on the *Larsen*, in hopes of being eventually transported to the South Pole. However, upon reaching Dunedin, New Zealand, the boxed *Aristocrat* was unloaded and placed in storage. It was scheduled to reach the South Pole on the *Eleanor Bolling*; however, the proposed trip was scheduled too late in the season for the *Bolling* to cut through the ice. The tail number of the plane was X7511. Mr. Pagano was not able to locate information concerning the *Aristocrat* after the Byrd expedition."

Letter dated 5 May 1979 from E.J. Demas, member of Byrd's Arctic Expedition, 1926, and Antarctic Expeditions I and II, states: "I am sorry to inform you I have no knowledge of the *Aristocrat* other than I saw the box it was packaged in at Wellington, New Zealand. It was transported to Dunedin to be shipped on the *Eleanor Bolling* on its second trip, which never took place. It is my belief that it was transported back to the United States and returned to the manufacturer."

Telephone conversations with Col. Frank E. Hoffman, USAF (Ret.) who was employed by General Airplanes Corporation, flew with the General Tire Fleet, and in 1932-33 owned NC-9446, one of the General Tire Fleet, stated that Byrd's *Aristocrat* was indeed returned to the General Airplanes plant in Buffalo from Dunedin, New Zealand, where they inspected the packing crate and the aircraft for water damage, etc. It later went to Atlantic City, New Jersey, no recollection of its history from then on. The plane was a "special, built for Byrd Antarctic Expedition, with special tanks, wings folded back and other features." It had a 110-horsepower Warner, was three-place. Persons in photo are, L to R: Gilbert Gardner, Plant Superintendent, GAC; Admiral Byrd; and pilot June Adams. Photo taken at Mitchel Field,

Long Island, date unknown, from Col. Hoffman's collection. Heavily retouched photos used in GAC brochures eliminated pilot Adams, and show writing on fuselage in white, different GAC emblem on rudder, and GAC emblem on front of fuselage.

From information from Joseph Juptner, Bill Larkins, Col. Hoffman, it appears that Byrd's airplane may have been Serial No. 2, as it is confirmed that No. 1 was prototype X6788, No. 3 was X7942, and that all three were *Aristocrat* Model 102, not 102-A. The first -A model was X-216-E, later NC-216-E, and was for a time one of the General Tire airplanes. Col. Hoffman is a member of the American Aviation Historical Society.

REWRITING AVIATION HISTORY

Robert A. Berreyesa, Sacramento, CA

This will be a tardy addendum to Jack McRae's letter in the Summer 1982 *Journal* (Vol. 27, No. 2) concerning the "rewriting" of aviation history. It is really appalling indeed to see the trash being printed, in many cases as Mr. McRae points out, by supposedly reputable sources, one of which is the Smithsonian Institution, which published in its monthly slick magazine about two years ago, for instance, a wildly inaccurate "expose" (by a writer named Percy Knauff) of the air traffic problems caused by "old planes" using the airways. Then Lou Casey's (then curator of aircraft at NASM) blast about the Wrights' catapult came along; and this combination finally tripped my bailout switch, and I canceled my Smithsonian membership and magazine subscription.

One thing (perhaps minor) that has caused frustration migraines since "journalists" first saw airplanes, is their insistence on calling airplane covering, "canvas." One can find this in *all* types of aero (and other) publications.

And now that the ball is rolling, allow me to list a couple more long-suppressed comments on things I have long groaned about in publications on the market. Let's start with the highly overrated 28-year-old book titled *Aircraft of the 1914-1918 War* by O.G. Thetford, with three-view drawings by E.J. Riding, one of the biggest disappointments ever printed.

On page 106, in the next-to-last paragraph, is the most asinine statement ever encountered concerning American personnel in WWI. The authors claim that American pilots in Italy were found to have insufficient physical strength to be able to operate the controls of the Caproni Ca 33 bombers. (If one reads British publications long enough, one can see these little digs against U.S. aviation all the time. It is a tradition with them, starting with the late C.G. Grey, who was the worst offender.)

And the graphics in this book (three-views at 1/72) are some of the most atrocious, hastily done, inaccurate scrambles one might ever run across. But this is a long-festering sore to modelers, which will not be commented on here. Accurate airplane drawings are as rare as written accounts containing no errors; and although nearly as significant as the written

accounts, are far harder to come by.

Mr. McRae might be heartened to read in the 1962 *American Heritage History of Flight*, on page 87, the statement that the Wrights did not use the famous catapult on the flights at Kitty Hawk in 1903. Where Charlie Grant and Lou Casey went astray is hard to fathom.

But for pure unadulterated belly laughs, don't miss one of the latest Italian coffee table publications called *Airplanes from the Dawn of Flight to the Present Day*. This pompously titled slicker was recently encountered in one of the local Walden Books outlets. According to the front pages, it was first published in 1971, but this was a 1982 edition. The author's name is Enzo Angelucci; the publisher (printing and binding) is Arnoldo Mondadori, Editore, from Verona. It is obviously opportunistically cashing in on the ongoing successful flood of slick books inundating the legitimate book market in the U.S.

The casual browser of this unbelievable tome will be brought up short at page 41 by a drawing of a Curtiss JN4-D powered by what looks like a rotary engine (under a round cowling), and colored bright green. Staggering to his feet, the browser may make it to page 64, where he will discover that the "unsuccessful" Dayton-Wright Racer had been made of "canvas and balsa wood"!

That was all that this browser could take; and brought to mind was the appropriate phrase no doubt uttered by Emperor Nero as his fiddle was disintegrating in the heat of that Roman conflagration: *Caveat emptor!*

"SPIRIT OF BATAAN" WHERE DID YOU GO?

Harry M. Davidson, Albuquerque, NM

On July 18, 1943, at Kirtland Army Air Base, Albuquerque, New Mexico, a B-17-F fresh from a factory was christened the *Spirit of Bataan*. Photos taken during the ceremony concentrated on the inscription on the nose of the aircraft and the serial number on the tail was not visible. Therefore all searching of official records to determine this aircraft's history has been useless. Will anyone who was at the ceremony and has a photograph of the aircraft contact the author. If any former crew members or persons who remember that this aircraft was in their unit, please contact the author. This is *not* the transport version of a B-17 that was General Douglas MacArthur's personal aircraft which also bore the same name.

The *Spirit of Bataan* has special meaning to the citizens of New Mexico. The New Mexico National Guard had been called to active duty in the spring of 1941. The majority of these New Mexicans were stationed in the Philippines when the Japanese attacked on December 8. Those who survived the fighting and the infamous Bataan Death March became prisoners of war.

In New Mexico, the families and friends of the POWs organized the Bataan Relief Society. Working with the International Red

Cross and the Swiss Embassy in Manila, efforts were made to send Red Cross packages to the POWs. By Christmas of 1942, a few ransacked packages were received by the survivors. POWs were also being sent to Japan and Korea as slave laborers. Until then the organization had avoided active support of the war effort in order not to give the Japanese any excuse for not allowing the POWs to receive the relief packages. Now it became clear that the most help the organization could provide was to help win the war.

The War Bond drive of the summer of 1943 was the biggest drive in New Mexico. More than enough bonds were sold by the Bataan Relief Society to equal the purchase price of a B-17. Naming an aircraft was a common reward for bond drives. Therefore the device to help win the war and take the war to Japan was logically a long-range bomber. The *Spirit of Bataan* was aptly named; however, the B-29 was to be the bomber to bring the war to the Japanese home islands. By June 1943, only the first three prototype models of the XB-29 had flown; so the B-17 was the best available.

For friends and loved ones, the people of New Mexico gave deeply as they felt the desire to end the war and bring their boys home. Now the citizens of New Mexico need to know the story of this aircraft. Where did it go? What did it do? What was its final disposition?

If you know any details please contact: Harry M. Davidson, 1408 Jefferson NE, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87110, (505) 256-7212.

FORUM OF FLIGHT, FALL '82 JOURNAL— CORRECTIONS

Jack D. Swaney, Las Vegas, NV

I found the "Forum of Flight" segment in the Fall '82 *Journal* most interesting, especially photo #2 of the OA-4 *Dolphins*.

A correction is in order, however. These craft were attached to the 10th Observation Squadron, March Field, not the 30th Bombardment, as stated in the caption, and comprised only half the equipment of the 10th, the remainder being Douglas O-38Ds.

Like the Fokker C-14 in #3, they were photographed while lined up on the western side of the old Grand Central Air Terminal at Glendale, California (note buildings in background in photo #3). I find this all very nostalgic to say the least, as I was there that Army Day of 1935.

SQUADRON INSIGNIA

Donald H. White, Berkeley, CA

I would like to commend the AAHS and their printing processors on the superb job done in reproducing my series of paintings of naval aircraft insignia.

Credits are in order, which I'd like to mention at this time, and are as follows:

Much credit to William Larkins, of course,

via his book, *U.S. Navy Aircraft 1921-1941*, from which most data was acquired. Any errors noted in work were due to my own careless study of his work, rather than his.

I didn't submit my 8 x 10 originals to AAHS, but sent photographic copies. This excellent job of photography was done by Richard P. Hunnicutt, to whom much credit must be given for its quality.

STEARMAN NOSTALGIA

Ben Donahue, Mountain View, CA

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The gentleman speaks of "the recurring theme that the Wright Brothers allegedly used a catapult for takeoff assistance on their 1903 flights." According to Orville Wright's own account of the first flight at Kitty Hawk, as quoted by Fred C. Kelly in his book, *The Wright Brothers*, the authorized biography of the two men, the aircraft made an unassisted takeoff from a track into a head wind of between nine and ten meters per second.

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The flights at Kitty Hawk used no catapult. Beginning in 1904 and thereafter, the derrick catapult seems to have been used regularly.

WOLAK'S ORIONS

Edward Peck, Waddy, KY

Edward Wolak errs when he implies that there is more than one surviving Lockheed single-engine *Orion* (Vol. 27, No. 3). The one he viewed in the Swiss Transport Museum is in fact the former NC-12222 mentioned by Terry Geer in his 1971 article—not one of those actually delivered to Swissair. I was at the museum on 3 October 1978 when this airplane was rigged for raising to its present position and I assisted by holding chains free of the wings.

With Swissair funding and restoration work, the museum acquired this sole remaining *Orion* from America after it had fallen

into poor condition following its sale and subsequent litigation involving the man who bought it from the Paul Mantz estate. It was built as an *Altair* model in 1931 but was converted at the factory to an *Orion* 9C Special later that year after lessee TWA damaged it at Columbus, Ohio. Sorry, Mr. Wolak—I very much wish you had discovered a second *Orion*!

MY FIRST JOURNAL—WOW!

Michael E. Rankin, Fort Worth, TX

I just received my very first copy of the *AAHS Journal*. "Wow" is all I can say. None of the articles covered my particular preferences in aviation history, but I am not so channeled in my preferences that I cannot enjoy well-written articles about other segments of aviation history. I just wish I had known about AAHS a long time ago. I've missed a lot of good historical information. You can be assured that I intend to remain a member for as long as I live. Your publication is just too good to miss!

Welcome to the Society, Michael. But you needn't miss out on past articles and issues of the Journal. We have a large stock of most back issues available at moderate prices. Tell a friend. —Editor

GOOD SHOW, AAHS!

Hans Kofoed, Denmark

May I take the opportunity to thank you for a very fine magazine, of which I read almost everything. I was especially very impressed with the articles about the Nicholas-Beazley Airplane Company and I hope to see more of that sort. Aeromarine is a subject I would welcome to see treated in such a detailed way, and also Fairchild/Kreider-Reisner.

Would you please consider another way for distribution of the *AAHS Newsletter*? No. 61 (First Quarter 1982) arrived late August! Is it

sent by sailship round Cape Horn? Well, the wind must have been favorable, because I received No. 62 a few days ago.

CAPTION CORRECTION

Chandler A. Robinson, Fort Worth, TX

The caption for the photo on page 306 of the *Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 4, Winter 1981, is in error and should read:

"Harry Guggenheim, Robert Goddard and Charles Lindbergh at the New Mexico launching site, September 1935."

(See *This High Man: The Life of Robert H. Goddard*, by Milton Lehman, 1963.)

VS-44s AND ARMS

Don Thomas, Dunedin, FL

Re Charlie Blair's letter to Mr. Sullivan on the VS-44s: While flying as a flight radio operator for Skyways International, I heard stories of their VS-44 which flew into the River Plate at night while flying arms to the Paraguayan rebels. Only the flight engineer survived; he was found clinging to a piece from the wreck. Apparently the loss affected the airline severely in a financial way; when it folded a few years later there were five Skyways C-46 aircraft parked on the airfield at Rome, Italy. Five of us crews took one of them for a return flight home to Miami, dropping one crew off in Paris to fly for another charter airline.

While in Rome for a few weeks waiting for a charter we always had an Italian-American character hanging around us in the hotel lobby for friendly conversation; probably a spy from the American Embassy or the Italians or Russians. One day, soon after our arrival, he asked me if we had arms aboard. I replied yes, we had "arms" aboard when we arrived. He scooted away promptly to report. (Our pilot was Captain Arms of Connecticut.)



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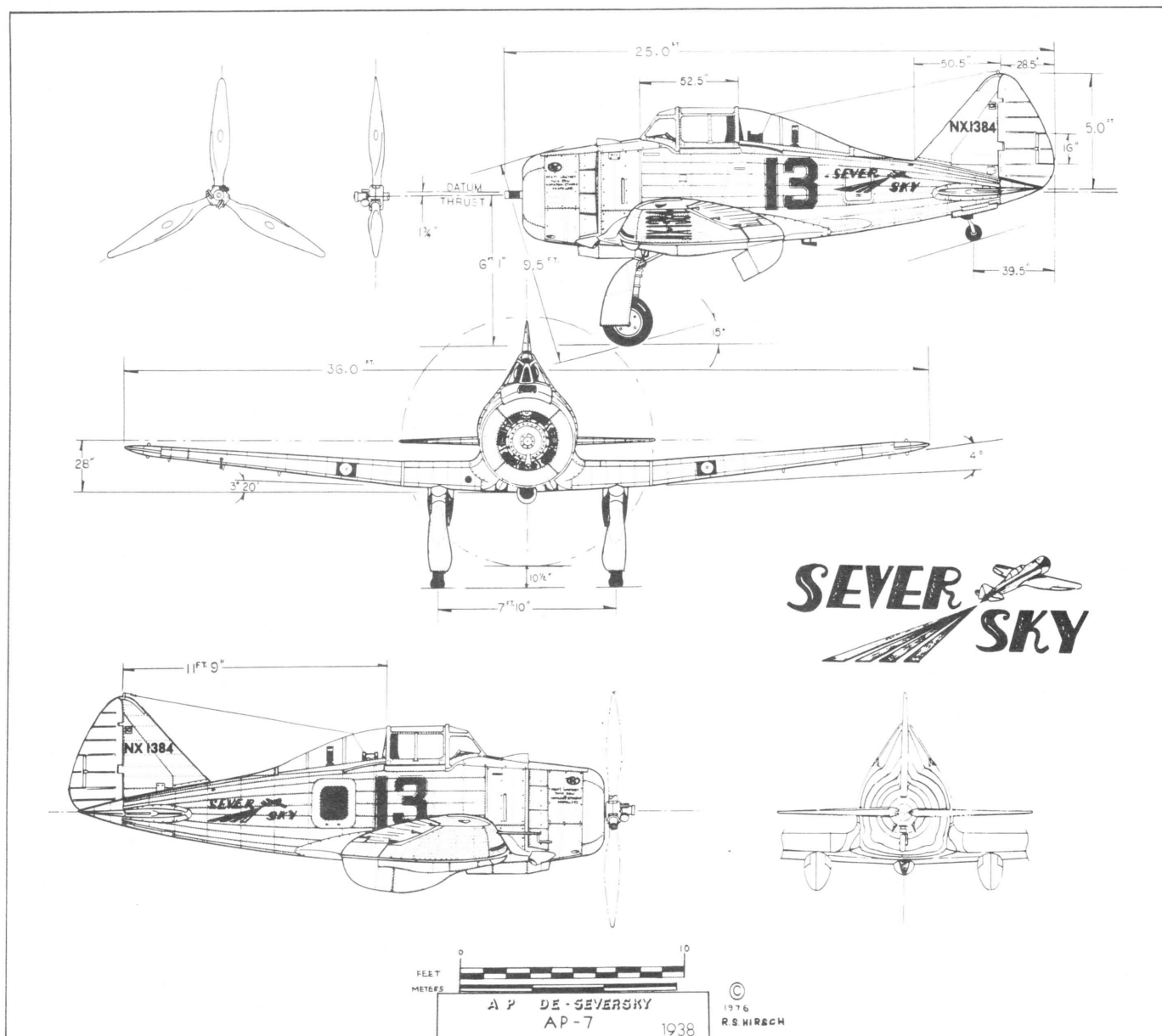
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Founded in 1956 as a non-profit, educational organization, to "encourage interest in—and the dissemination of knowledge of significant importance to aviation history," the Society now has a worldwide membership.

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Following is a description of my aviation history interests for publication in the next NEWSLETTER as my introduction:

Check here ☐ if you do NOT wish publication of your name and address in the Newsletter.