

NEWS & COMMENT FROM OUR MEMBERS

FORUM OF FLIGHT 92-3 JOURNAL

Louis Barr, Henderson, Nevada

In the interest of accuracy I call your attention to the mis-captioning of a photo in the Forum of Flight section, page 237, picture 10, in Volume 37, No. 3, Fall 1992 issue of the *Journal*.

The picture is actually a Lockheed 049 Constellation, Reg. No. N86500.

I offer this correction, not as a nitpicker (a breed I particularly despise), but rather to preserve the reputation of the Society and the *Journal* for its accuracy.

NORTH AMERICAN AVIATION BOMBERS I HAVE KNOWN AND FLOWN

Boardman C. Reed, Brownsville, California

My reminiscences on B-25 bombers in the Winter 1992 *Journal* brought a most unexpected dividend. Many different aviators were named to give the narrative some human interest, including Sergeant William S. Underwood, the radio operator on our cross-country flight to Boston, November 2, 1941.

The post office had hardly delivered our *Journals* when I received a letter from Colonel Bill Underwood in Tucson, Arizona: "Your narrative helped me recall B-18, B-23 and B-25 events and Air Corps times not too many folks were privileged to experience . . . you and I not only did much flying together but were friends, as much as the system allowed. I looked on all you new pilots as role models. . . ."

"Since radio operators and their equipment weren't included in the Doolittle operation, my friends went on the raid and Major Rutherford recommended me for flying school. I graduated in May 1943, instructed in B-24s, then joined the 19th Bomb. Group as a B-29 AC [Aircraft Commander] and flight leader. Flew 28 missions against Japan out of Guam. Stayed in after the war and helped form new B-29 groups up to the start of the Korean War, then went into headquarters work. Three years in Europe, four years as an instructor at the Air Force Command and Staff College and seven years at the Pentagon. Did my year in 'Nam' at Tan Son Nhut Air Base during Tet time. Finished up in charge of AF Logistics Command's data automation operation. Retired in 1972 after six years as a colonel and with 4,500 flying hours. Have been involved in all kinds of AF retired activities since."



Fifty-one years after we flew together in the Army Air Corps, Bill Underwood and I are now back together again, this time as old and valued friends . . . thanks to the AAHS *Journal*. Letters have been received from other members of the 17th Bomb. Group also.

EARHART'S LOCKHEED VEGA

R.A. Morley, Tucson, Arizona

Amelia Earhart takes delivery of her Lockheed Vega, NR-795-Y. She would use this airplane for her 1932 record-making solo Atlantic flight, May 20th, and her solo Los Angeles-Newark flight, August 24th. L to r: Earhart, unknown, Carl Squier, vice president-sales, Lloyd Stearman, president, circa 1932. (R.A. Morley Collection)

ALFRED W. LAWSON

Richard A. Stevens, Tucson, Arizona

I have enclosed a paper that was given to me when I stopped to inquire about a sign on Freeway 94 near Racine, Wisconsin, this past summer [1992].

After reading the information I looked through all the aviation history books that I have and wrote the National Air and Space Museum. I never received a reply from them

but did find one paragraph in the *Smithsonian Book of Flight*, which credits Alfred Lawson with the first large airliner:

"Alfred [E.] Lawson, a great, passionate eccentric, both designed the first big passenger aircraft and coined the term 'airliner' which we use to this day. He and his brainchild were not only ahead of their time, but ahead of airlines, airline routes and, of course, airline passengers."

It interests me that this man who was rather controversial in many ways should not be given credit for his developments in aviation. Some of his accomplishments are:

- Started his first aviation magazine, *FLY*, in Philadelphia in November 1908.
- Edited a five-volume set of aviation books, *Aircraft*, 1908-1914.
- Edited the magazine, *Aircraft*, in 1910.
- Invented and built the first great night passenger airliner in the world (was granted U.S. patent No. 1568855 for Passenger Compartments).
- First to put into airplanes—sleeping berths, baths, heated cabins.
- Founded Lawson Airlines with established transcontinental route structure.
- Proposed transoceanic flight by placing floating airstrips (aircraft carriers) at 50-mile intervals for airplanes to land upon and fly from that would enable "a thousand planes a day" to cross the Atlantic in suitable weather.
- Edited "Glossary of Aviation Terms" in



Webster's Dictionary published in 1912 containing the word "Aircraft" coined by Lawson in 1908 and trademarked by him in 1910.

Alfred W. Lawson's giant airliner was built in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1919, first flying that year, and received wide publicity in newspapers and magazines for his public demonstrations around the U.S. Touted as the first great night passenger in the world, its commodious cabin with wicker seats and large smoked celluloid windows converted to sleeping berths for night operation. It was also to serve as a flying post office, carrying 6,000 pounds of mail that could be routed within the cabin. A chute in the floor was to enable transferring of mail to a smaller plane in flight.

From an article in the September 22, 1919 issue of *Aerial Age Weekly* covering one of the many demonstration flights we can get a feel for both the luxurious accommodations and the rather primitive state of the industry in 1919.

"Interrupting their game of bridge from time to time to observe the cloudscapes, visible through the windows of their cabin fuselage, four passengers reached Mitchel Field, Mineola, September 13, aboard a Lawson Air Liner in a flight which occupied two hours and forty-seven minutes. It left Syracuse at 8 o'clock in the morning. The distance traveled was estimated at 313 miles.

"The bridge players sat in wicker chairs, were protected from the rush of air created by their rush transit through space at 111 miles per hour by celluloid windows smoked to guard against the sun glare in the upper levels, and occasionally rose and walked up and down the aisle to stretch their legs. Forward in the pilots' seat sat Alfred W. Lawson, the genius of the Lawson Air Line, and Charles Cox, the assistant pilot. They had dual controls for governing the craft so that when either got tired the other could run the ship alone.

"Those taking part in the card game were Mr. and Mrs. Walter Carrier of Syracuse, Miss Anna B. Cowse and John Cullum, the latter pair representing Syracuse newspapers. Looking on when their attention was not required elsewhere were Vincent Bura-nelli, the engineer, and Carl Schorny and Alfred S. Suini, mechanics. Altogether the craft carried nine.

"It was a wonderful day and a wonderful ride. Everybody aboard agreed to that. If it



hadn't been for the smoking of the celluloid the September sunshine might have been a bit bothersome, but with that precaution conditions were perfect.

"They were pretty much up in the air when from the pilot came the word that New York was in sight and passengers should prepare to land. Roosevelt Field had been chosen in advance, and the big plane headed for there, but Mr. Lawson changed his mind when he saw Mitchel Field. He noted that it was clear and smooth and eased the ship down.

"It was considerably more than a flight from Syracuse the plane finished at Mineola, for it has been on the go pretty steadily for the past month, ever since it left Milwaukee for Chicago. It flew from the Windy City to Cleveland, then to Toledo, to Buffalo and Syracuse. At Toledo it was delayed a bit by grazing the branches of a tree. At Syracuse it made a bad landing at Bethko Field and was laid up ten days for repair.

"The Lawson is the first multi-motored passenger-carrying plane with enclosed cabin to attempt a cross-country flight in the United States.

"Its flight from Milwaukee to New York is a distinct achievement, and Mr. Lawson is to be heartily congratulated.

"On September 15 a group of aeronautic authorities and newspaper men made a trip from Mineola to New York in the Lawson air liner . . ."

Being ahead of its time is noteworthy, but being ahead of the demand is terminal, thus the Lawson Air Liner and Air Line passed into oblivion, leaving little trace of its existence on the pages of aviation history.

The bulk of text presented above was extracted from the paper *Benefactor*, *Special Historical Issue*, Vol. 2 No. 10, published in 1939 by Alfred Lawson. Quoted text was much reduced copies of published pages printed in Lawson's paper. —Managing Editor

THE MILWAUKEE JOURNAL
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Milwaukee-Made Lawson Air Liner Pioneers Transportation De Luxe

First Air Pullman Vies With Its Railway Rival
Luxurious Appointment of New Type of Plane Attractive and Comfortable to Operate Over First Mail Contract Route to "Hawkeye"

ALFRED W. LAWSON
The Lawson Air Liner, the first of its kind, is shown in flight over the city of Milwaukee. The plane is a large, multi-engine aircraft with a high-wing configuration. It is shown in profile, flying towards the right. The background shows a cityscape with buildings and trees.

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ALFRED LAWSON
He was one of the first men in the world to fly.