

THE MAIL SACK *

"The Search for the "Union R" " - Heinz Nowarra.

This is the story of my search for information on a rare airplane.

Anyone who has studied the history of the development of aircraft during World War I will perhaps have heard of the mysterious aircraft with the designation, "Union R". It is well known that Germany developed during the War giant aircraft which were called "Riesenflugzeuge" and were registered as "R-types". But in all the source-books on the history of German aviation you will search in vain for mention of the Union R. The first time I came across a mention of this aircraft was in a now-forgotten paper, "Luftwaffe", published in Germany in 1917-18. There was a mention - but no drawing, no sketch, no photograph. My next clue to the story of this plane came while I was digging in some old files and photo-albums in Berlin. One day, at last, I came across my first photo of the plane itself - a front view of the Union R. Two years later I was sent a 2/3 rear shot of it by my friend Peter M. Grosz, and some time later he sent me a 3/4 front close-up.

Meanwhile I was searching everywhere, asking every possible contact, for more information on this plane. However all I could find out was that it was built before Staaken, DFW, Siemens-Schuckert, Aviatik, Linke-Hoffman, or any of the other aircraft firms built their giants. I learned that it was powered by four 120 h.p. Mercedes engines, and that in some ways it was similar to Sikorski's "Ilja Morumetz". The firm, Union-Flugzeugwerke, was a small company located at Teltow just outside of Berlin. Curiously enough, I learned that one of the people who put up money for this plane was Werner Rittberger, the skating-master whom I had known as a boy. I learned also that the Union firm went out of business when the "Inspektion der Fliegertruppe", the office responsible for accepting aircraft for the German Flying Corps, did not accept the plane. At this time (1954) no-one could tell me why they had refused the plane.

Among the many old pilots who had helped me to locate photos of pre-1919 German aircraft was a Herr Werner Zorn. During World War I he had been an engineer at the AEG aircraft factory at Nieder-Neuendorf, north of Berlin. (From him I had obtained the only existing photos of the ill-fated AEG R I.) In October 1959 he phoned me and told me that while he was on vacation in Southwest Germany he had seen a large photo-album that belonged to a lawyer, a friend of his wife. This lawyer had collected aviation postcards when he was a boy and had a large collection of them. Herr Zorn had borrowed this album from the lawyer, brought it from the Schwarzwald, where the lawyer lived, to Berlin and lent it to me. The album contained over 400 postcards (most of which I had already seen) however among these

* Photos for the Mail Sack will be found on page 161.

post-cards were four which told the story of the fate of the Union R. They were copied from partly damaged glass negatives and only small parts of the originals were able to be photo-copied. But these tell their own story.

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"A Curtiss-Reid Rambler" - K. M. Molson

Canadian member Kenneth Molson sent in the photograph of the American registered Curtiss-Reid Rambler. In his commentary on the photograph he noted: "It shows a Curtiss-Reid Rambler fitted with an American Cirrus engine and registered NC661W. It was the only Rambler with the American Cirrus and was supplied to the Curtiss-Wright Company. However I know nothing of this aircraft other than that and would be glad to hear anybody who has its United States history." K.M. Molson, 65 Sir Williams Lane, Islington, Ontario, Canada.

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"Whatssit?" - Major Kimbrough S. Brown USAF

Major Brown sent in the "Whatssit". He said that he had obtained this "photograph of an unusual appearing aircraft...from the album of a former Australian aviator of World War I." He concluded: "It is beyond my reference sources to identify this machine, and owing to its unique appearance, it occurred to me that perhaps your readers might enjoy seeing it in print and attempting to identify it."

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"Flying Test Bed" - Harry S. Gann, Jr.

Harry Gann, the Society's Treasurer, sent in the unusual Northrup photo. Concerning this test bed he wrote:

"One of the most unusual uses of an airplane as a flying test bed was the case of Northrop A-17, AC35-122. The A-17 was the Air Corps standard attack aircraft of the middle thirties and was rather racey for its day. In order to obtain test data on the maximum wing chord percentage that laminar flow could be maintained on the wing section to be used on the Douglas C-74 "Globemaster I", a full scale section was installed on the A-17. Since there was quite a difference in aircraft sizes, the test article took on a rather grotesque appearance.

"While the appearance in the photograph does not so indicate, an extremely smooth surface was used in an effort to obtain delayed separation in the airflow around the wing. The two outboard propellers were driven by air to simulate the prop wash. The gadgets hanging

on the trailing edge of the wing were pressure rake supports.

"Under these "ideal" conditions, laminar flow was obtained along 30 percent of the upper surface and 60 percent of the lower wing surface. Under actual conditions, these values are unobtainable because the smooth surface can not be economically maintained."

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"Another Wright Project" - E. D. Weeks

E. D. "Hud" Weeks writes that "Andy" Louis Anderson, Route #2, Mansfield, Missouri "is planning to build a flyable EX Rogers model Wright. "Hud" has agreed to help corral the plans, a Wright engine if possible, details, and support of all kinds necessary to get the Wright in the air." Weeks further states: "We plan to enlist the advice of all museums, Charlie Wiggins (Rogers' mechanic), old Wright workers such as Bill Conover, Pete Bowers (another Wright EX projectier) and any loyal antiquer who wants to see a warper with double fans go again..."

"Briefly, Andy is an aero sprayer who has several hangars, an air strip, and many fine "classic" period antiques already. To name a few: a Travelaire, Curtiss Jr. Waco, Robin, Eaglerock, Fleet, etc. Andy has joined a man in a project to build a Disney type attraction on Highway 66 near St. Louis where they will have an aero museum and strip. The first museum of flying ships. He now seeks to add pioneer and World War I ships to his OX-5 period collection to give the new museum, already under construction, a wider display.

"Andy is a 10,000 hour pilot and an A & E. He has an A & E helper. He gets the job done. After the Wright a Bleriot, Nieuport, and Curtiss Pusher are planned..."

"Anyone wishing to send data, details and leads (or sell items) can write Andy direct or Hud Weeks, 120 Des Moines St., Des Moines, Iowa. First priority is the location of some good EX or B Wright plans, with detail, and also the whereabouts of a Wright engine for rebuilding or loan."

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

Canadian Registrations:

Peter M. Bowers in his letter concerning the Southern Cross on p. 70-71 of vol. 5, No. 1 discusses the civil registration markings of the British Commonwealth of Nations. The statements made are not completely correct as applied to Canada but may be quite in order for some or all of the other Commonwealth Nations.

An International Air Conference held in Geneva in June 1928 changed the Canadian national markings from G-CA-- to CF----- . This change was implemented by letter by Ottawa the following December and it may be taken that all aircraft being registered in Canada for the first time after that date wore the CF- registration. However no change was made to the existing aircraft registered in the G-CA-- series which wore their original markings to the end of their days unless they were altered for other reasons.

One other point of interest occurred at this time in that the nationality marking was no longer required on the rudder. Thus if a photo of a G-CA-- registered aircraft is seen with "G" on its rudder it must have been photographed prior to approximately January 1st, 1929 or fairly soon after and conversely if no "G" appears on the rudder it must have been after approximately January 1st, 1929. Also of interest to those interested in markings is that one or two aircraft in the early CF- series carried the CF on their rudders for a short period, presumably from force of habit.

K. M. Molson
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Islington, Ontario, Canada

Book Buying by A. A. H. S. Members:

It may be of interest to members of the AAHS to know that copies of the 1959/60 edition of Janes' All the World's Aircraft can be ordered from British Publications, Inc., 30 East 60th St., New York 22, N. Y. at the price of \$17.50. Delivery is made directly from England.

Jack McRae, Huntington Station, N. Y.

Another member has noted that Heinz Nowarra's, Die Entwicklung der Flugzeuge 1914-1918 can be purchased directly from the author for 20 DM (\$5.50 American). Write to Heinz J. Nowarra, 41 Emdenerstrasse, Berlin N. W. 21 Federal Republic of Germany.)

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Japanese International Flights:

Mr. Chalmers Johnson is to be commended for his excellent and informative article "Japanese International Flights of the 1930's" published in Vol. 4 No. 4, 1959 of the J. A. A. H. S. One can appreciate the great amount of time and work required to translate from one language to another. Fortunately there are among us a few blessed with the ability to cross the language barrier and enable us thereby to have an insight into what would otherwise be a closed book.

Unfortunately however, errors in original material being translated are difficult to detect and are many times passed on in the translation as fact. Mr. Johnson's article appears to be a victim of such circumstances and contains a

contradiction as well as an erroneous presentation of fact.

In his reference #10 the author refers to his letter published on page 169 of the J.A.A.H.S. for 1956 (Vol. 1 No. 4). This letter tells us that the Lockheed Altair c/n 213, X-14209-J-BAUC was manufactured in 1933 and was reported to have been sold by the Mainichi Shimbun to the LYON FLIGHT EXPEDITION CO. INC. for entry in the MacRobertson International Air Race from England to Melbourne, Australia held in Oct. of 1934. The plane, entered under its original U.S. registration NR-14209, was later withdrawn from the competition. We are also led to believe that the original entry in the race, listed as an Orion, is in error inasmuch as the registration belongs to an Altair. However, while there is still some doubt as to the original assignment of this specific registration number, it has no bearing on Mr. Johnson's story. On the surface the data included in Mr. Johnson's letter is entirely feasible if the plane was built in 1933. This is not true, however.

On page 278 of the story of the "Japanese International Flights of the 1930's," the author mentions that the new type Lockheed Altair (J-BAUC) c/n 213 was bought by Mainichi Shimbun for a flight from Tokyo to Manchuria after the original Tokyo to Manila and return flight which took place between Nov. 10, 1935 and Nov. 26, 1935 was made in Lockheed Altair c/n 188 J-BAMC. In addition to the projected Tokyo to Manchuria flight, a special flight from Tokyo to Siam was planned in the newly produced aircraft for sometime in 1936.

Richard M. Bueschel, AAHS Member, a recognized authority on Japanese aviation, has furnished the following entries from the Japanese Civil Aircraft Registers which should serve to clear up the point in question, the date of manufacture of Lockheed Altair c/n 213, NR-14209-J-BAUC.

1933 Civil Register - Japan

J-BAMC: Lockheed Altair

BUILDER'S #: 188 (Built in 1931)

POWER: R. & W. Wasp Super-D

A.I.R. #: 5-0479

OWNER: Osaka Mainichi Shimbunsha. (Mainichi Press Association.

RESIDENCE: Osaka, Japan

HOME STATION: Osaka Airport

1st C. of A. #: 2297

DATE OF ISSUE: March 1932 (Renewed: Feb. 1933, May 1934, May 1935, Dec. 1935, Feb. 1937)

REMARKS by Bueschel: In civil register as late as 1938 records, perhaps later. One Japanese source suggests that this aircraft was still in existence in August of 1945 at the end of the war but I have been unable to confirm.

1936 Civil Register - Japan

J-BAUC: Lockheed Altair

OWNER: Osaka Mainichi Shimbunsha
(Mainichi Press Association)

BUILDER'S #: 213 (Built in 1935)

RESIDENCE: Osaka, Japan

POWER: P. & W. Wasp S1D1

HOME STATION: Osaka Airport

A.I.R. #: 5-0801

1st C. of A. #: 3727

DATE OF ISSUE: July 1935 (Renewed: Oct. 1935, April 1936, March 1937)

REMARKS by Bueschel: In civil register as late as 1938 records where my complete records end.

Therefore, it is obvious that Altair c/n 213 could not have been purchased from Mainichi Press by the Lyon Flight Expedition Co. Inc. for use in the MacRobertson Race held on Oct. 20, 1934. Although the registration NR-14209 was assigned to the aircraft entered in the race by the Lyon Flight Expedition Co. Inc. as early as June 1, 1934, this date representing the deadline for entry in the race; the craft which ultimately carried this number was first certified to fly in July of 1935.

The Sept. 27, 1934 issue of "Flight" (British) carries a complete list of the MacRobertson Race entries. Entry #32 on this list is a Lockheed Orion entered by the Lyon Flight Expedition Co. Inc., and gives the registration number of the plane entered as NR-14209. Obviously the British did not just pull this number out of midair, but did take it from the official entry blank of the competitor which was filed on June 1, 1934. The eventual assignment of this number to an Altair, rather than an Orion as indicated, raises some doubt on the accuracy of this entry; however it has no bearing on this particular occasion.

The Japanese acquisition of this particular aircraft, in view of its questionable origin, is interesting in that the following hypothetical circumstances can be considered. From the information at hand it appears more likely that a Lockheed low wing monoplane was ordered by the Lyon Flight Expedition Co. Inc. early in 1934 with a completion date set prior to Oct. 20, 1934 so that the plane could be either shipped or flown to England for the start of the MacRobertson Race on the above date. However, when the purchaser could not meet his financial obligation, either to complete the aircraft, or for the completed aircraft, the order was obviously cancelled and Lockheed was stuck with a partially completed special long range aircraft which they were very happy to complete as an Altair and unload it to the Japanese when the opportunity arose the following year. Comments on this theory would be appreciated.

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