

'VIN FIZ'

Commemorative Flight

A PROGRESS REPORT, up to the minute, by Peter Bowers

The response from the A.A.H.S. Members to the suggestion made in the JOURNAL for duplicating the first transcontinental flight of an airplane, with a similar type, on the Fiftieth Anniversary, has been so enthusiastic that the flight is definitely "ON". There are many decisions yet to be made, and it is hoped that the Members will again express their feelings. Here is how things stand as of Mid-February 1961.

Construction of the airplane is well under way, with the wings completed. Details have been most generously supplied by Capt. Ralph Barnaby of the Franklin Institute of Philadelphia, who photographed the details of the Wright Model B on display in the museum there; by Drs. Philip Hopkins and Paul Garber of the Smithsonian Institute where the original Model EX is on exhibit after complete restoration; by Harold Andrews, who made many measurements of the Model EX, and by Charles Wiggin of Westport Conn., who is the top "EX Expert", having accompanied the original flight and who rebuilt the "Vin Fiz" and other Wright models several times.

The project has grown and support has come from some surprising directions. The Federal Aviation Agency has taken official recognition and has designated the route as the Calbraith P. Rogers Memorial Airway. Blanche Noyes, a well known aviatrix of the early 1930's and presently Chief of the Air Marking Staff of the F.A.A. Bureau of Facilities, is in charge of this and is working closely with Mrs. Charles Wiggin. Mrs. Wiggin is the former Mrs. Calbraith P. Rogers, who married Mr. Wiggin after Rogers' death in 1912. She has written a book on the flight, to be released on the 50th Anniversary of Rogers' flight.

When Mrs. Noyes heard about this project, the Bowers Anniversary Flight, she wrote, outlining suggested plans and proposing that we get together on the two programs. The main problem right now is the actual timing of the airway dedication and of the flight. Opinions from A.A.H.S. Members will be appreciated on this.

The problem from my point of view is that the flight took approximately two months to complete, and I have only one month available. There appear to be two ways to go about it, to compress the schedule and fly straight through in one month, weather and other considerations permitting, or to make the flight in two parts. The disadvantage from the historical standpoint is that the dates of arrival and departure at the waypoints will be off. In the latter course we could start on the proper date at Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, fly for two weeks and stop at

Kansas City or beyond, then come back a month later (after work in Seattle) and finish in another two weeks, arriving on the proper date. Incidentally, the "Vin Fiz" never did make it to Long Beach. Rogers crashed for the last time about six miles short, and Rogers completed the flight in a borrowed airplane, after getting out of the hospital. The flight was declared officially over at Pasadena.

One straight-through flight would, of course, be easiest to arrange, cost less, but be harder for the pilot. A split schedule would be difficult to "sell" to the boss but the mid-point rest would be welcome. An alternative would be to have another pilot for the middle period, but I have no enthusiasm for it. Andy Andrews of Mansfield, Mo. is building an EX replica but does not appear to be interested in flying it cross-country. If he decides to beat the Bowers replica to completion and make the flight himself, perhaps this could be turned into what the original idea was - a race, with starts from each Coast!

Prompt advance of Member opinions regarding dates will be welcome so that final planning can get under way, and if a middle or late summer date can be fixed then school-age son David can be used as ground crew.

Participation by any Members of the A.A.H.S. is also welcomed. (See Society Affairs - Edit.) It would be on a local basis and Members who live at or near these points can help in a number of ways by becoming "Local Coordinators". One is to generate interest in the Anniversary Flight with local publicity, reprints of original news articles or interviews with local eye-witness residents, etc. Another is to help directly by selecting the proper airport, hangarage, servicing, etc. at the overnight stops, and by being available for phone calls from stops at previous points of the route regarding weather and other data. Rogers did most of his sleeping on the special train that accompanied the flight, and the only definite hotel stop known is the Maryland Hotel at the end of the route, Pasadena.

As can be seen from the route, many stops were definitely NOT at planned or even logical locations. Interestingly, 23 of the 69 stops were in Texas. The list was supplied by Mrs. Blanche Noyes, and some of them cannot now be found on maps of the U.S., including sectional charts or road maps. Many stops were made because of weather, or for mechanical reasons, or perhaps merely by getting lost. Navigation procedure on the Anniversary Flight will be to memorize the route to the next airport, and then go.... It will be next to impossible to actually read a map during flight in the replica "Vin Fiz".

At present the airplane presents no difficulty, being very simple to build. Both Messrs. Wiggin and Barnaby (the latter learned to fly a Wright Model B in 1912) approve the improvements suggested so far. Other than the fasteners, the means of holding it together, and the powerplant, which will be a Ford Model A engine, the replica will be as accurate as possible. It will have warping wings and be built mostly of wood. A major problem is the propellers. Hud Weeks, of Des Moines, Iowa, and from whom I bought another replica, a 1912 Curtiss, owns an actual Wright-built propeller, and has sent all of the details. Is any A.A.H.S. Member in a position to carve a set of pusher props? Plus a spare set?

As for finance, my part is purely "for fun" and no one is sponsoring the Anniversary Flight. Magazine articles are in preparation, but these cannot be construed as sponsorship or backing. It will be an amateur's effort in behalf of a hobby. Even those A.A.H.S. Members who will become involved in local coordination will not be out-of-pocket and it will involve little more than their own time.

It is difficult to state how the arrival of the replica at stops along the way should be handled. Scheduling will be the most important factor, and after the Flight has once begun, even though the replica is more reliable than the original, we will be subject to the same weather handicaps. Then the local coordinators may have up to a day's notice, phoned ahead from a stop, and in other times only an hour's notice. Good communications will be essential to keep track of the machine. This whole problem complicates plans for any commemorative meetings, and even local get-togethers or dinner meetings.

In those cases where a coordinator cannot be found at a particular stop, the "Vin Fiz" may just drop in unannounced, refuel, and depart as quickly as possible. Since many of the stops of the original

1911 flight were made by necessity rather than by choice, we may skip some of them completely. As soon as a group of volunteer coordinators has been established we may then work out a logical spacing of the route stops.

Another item that must be left to the local coordinator is the choice of airport near the route stop, if several are available. It would be best to land at the smaller "lightplane" type of airport, if there be such, rather than the large municipal type with two-mile runways, airline and military traffic. This holds, even if it be known that Rogers originally landed at the side of the larger airport. From the spectator's standpoint, the smaller fields are better, since they can be closer to the actual landing and takeoff. For the operation of a 1911 type airplane, the smaller airport rules are frequently more flexible and permission can be obtained to take off from the taxiway directly by the gas pump. Today's long taxi jaunts were not a part of 1911 flying; takeoff was made right from the spot where the prop was turned and spectators could see what was going on.

Further progress will be reported again, in the next JOURNAL. It is hoped, by then, to have a list of the local coordinators with whom communication can be established to aid in the flight as well as serve as the disseminators of information to local people. Volunteer help is needed to make this commemorative Fiftieth Anniversary Flight of the "Vin Fiz" a success.

Peter M. Bowers.

THE ROUTE OF THE ORIGINAL "VIN FIZ" FLIGHT

Start: Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, N.Y.

STOP	PLACE	STOP	PLACE	STOP	PLACE
1	Middletown, N.Y.	24	Nebo, Illinois	47	Sabinal, Texas
2	Hancock, N.Y.	25	Thompson, Missouri	48	Uvalde, Tex.
3	Scranton, Pennsylvania	26	Marshall, Mo.	49	Spofford, Tex.
4	Great Bend, N.Y.	27	Blue Springs, Mo.	50	Del Rio, Tex.
5	Binghampton, N.Y.	28	Kansas City, Mo.	51	Sanderson, Tex.
6	Elmira, N.Y.	29	Kansas City, Kansas	52	Alpine, Tex.
7	Hornell-Canisteo, N.Y.	30	Moran, Kan.	53	Marfa, Tex.
8	Salamanca-Olean, N.Y.	31	Russell Creek, Vinita, Okla.	54	Sierra Blanca, Tex.
9	Meadville, Pa.	32	Muscogee, Okla.	55	Fort Hancock, Tex.
10	Warren, Ohio	33	McAlester, Okla.	56	El Paso, Tex.
11	Kent, Ohio	34	Denison, Tex.	57	Deming, New Mexico
12	Mansfield, Ohio	35	Whitesboro, Tex.	58	Lordsburg, N.M.
13	Marion, Ohio	36	Gainesville, Tex.	59	Wilcox, N.M.
14	Rivare, Indiana	37	Bonita, Tex.	60	Tucson, Arizona
15	Geneva, Ind.	38	Fort Worth, Tex.	61	Phoenix, Ariz.
16	Huntington, Ind.	39	Dallas, Tex.	62	Maricopa, Ariz.
17	Hammond, Ind.	40	Ward, Tex.	63	Stovall, Ariz.
18	Chicago, Illinois	41	Granger, Tex.	64	Imperial Jct., Calif.
19	Joliet, Ill.	42	Austin, Tex.	65	Banning, Calif.
20	Streator, Ill.	43	Kyle, Tex.	66	Pomona, Calif.
21	Peoria, Ill.	44	San Marcos, Tex.	67	Pasadena, Calif.
22	Middletown, Ill.	45	San Antonio, Tex.	68	Compton, Calif.
23	Springfield, Ill.	46	La Costa, Tex.	69	Long Beach, Calif.