

NEWS & COMMENTS FROM OUR MEMBERS

Unlikely Eagles, Vol 63, No. 4 – Fall 2018

I ran across two errors in the “Unlikely Eagles” article by Capt Kanakis in the Winter 2018 AAHS Journal.

On page 269 he states that General Hap Arnold retired as General of the Air Force in 1949. This is not exactly true. General Arnold officially retired as Commanding General of the Army Air Forces (four-star general) on June 30, 1946. Later, Public Law 81-58, enacted May 7, 1949, designated Arnold as “General of the Air Force,” a five-star rank, although he had been retired from active duty for almost three years.

The second error, in my opinion, was in the caption at the lower right of page 277. The caption says that the aircraft is a North American AT-6. I believe this is incorrect for three reasons, at least. First, the landing gear has no doors over the strut, the rear cockpit canopy has a triangular section of plexiglass, and the plane was being used at Stewart AAF at a time when they were using BT-13s (see photo at top of page 278). Therefore, I believe that the “AT-6” is actually a Vultee BT-13.

Mike Hoffman
Windcrest, Texas

Editor's reply: I believe the eagle-eyed Mr. Hoffman is indeed correct that the aircraft in question is a Vultee BT-13.

The Search for historical Truth by Thomas C. Pacshaw, Vol. 63, No. 2 - Summer 2018

There was another fatal accident at Bradley Field a few months later (see following). A Lockheed A-29 crashed in the vicinity of the airport on February 11, 1942, while flying a photo mission.

The pilot of that aircraft, 1st Lt. Melvin W. Schoephoester was my son-in-law's mother's first husband. There was one child from this marriage, who now resides in North Carolina. Schoephoester's widow married another U.S. Army officer, who later became a two-star general, and had three children, one who is my son-in-law.

The road into the terminal at Bradley International Airport is “Schoephoester Road”, named after him.

Sincerely,
Paul Trask

Grandbury, Conn., February 11, 1942, by Jim Ignasher

On February 11, 1942, a Lockheed A-29A attack bomber (41-23340) with six men aboard was flying at 28,000 ft when the aircraft suffered a catastrophic malfunction. According to one press report, numerous people on the ground had seen the plane's right wing fall off while it was still falling from the sky.

One witness was Gordon Hayes, an aircraft spotter on duty in the Suffield Observation Post. He described how the aircraft

went into a “corkscrew spin” as it came down.

Another was Paul Hass of West Suffield, who said that at one point the plane appeared to straighten out before going into another spin, and from his vantage point one wing appeared to be missing.

Mrs. Elmer Mortensen of Bloomfield related how she saw one crewman jump from the plane. “Soon, speck came out of the heavens,” she recalled, “The as the speck grew, I saw a stream of smoke with it. I heard the motor skipping, and then the plane came down fast, straight down it seemed. While it was smoking a man bailed out with a parachute.”

An unidentified operator of a garage in East Granby also reported seeing the plane fall with a wing and a portion of the tail missing.

The plane crashed shortly before 4:00 p.m., in a gully behind the Petraitis residence at 151 South Main Street. There was no explosion or fire. State police and officials from Bradley Field in Windsor Locks responded. Hundreds of curious spectators descended on the scene and police were busy keeping crowds at bay.

The dead were identified as:

1st Lt. Melvin W. Schoephoester of Baraboo, Wisconsin.
(Pilot)

2nd Lt. Walter C. Boyle of LaCrosse, Wisconsin.

S/Sgt. Michael M. Kaufman of Windsor Locks, Connecticut.

Sgt. Gordon Johnson of Renov, Pennsylvania.

Sgt. Thomas F. Quinn of Upper Darby, Pennsylvania.

Sgt. John T. Howey, Jr. of New York City, N.Y.

Missing at the wreck site was the body of the pilot, and it was presumed he'd bailed out prior to the crash. An open parachute was later found a few miles away in East Willington, and a search was conducted there without results. Schoephoester's body was later recovered less than two miles from the crash with his parachute. An official from Bradley offered his opinion that Schoephoester had slipped from this chute after jumping, and that the weight of the harness was enough to keep it open while prevailing winds carried it a considerable distance.



Lockheed A-29, similar to the one flown by 1st Lt. Melvin W. Schoephoester the day of the accident. (AAHS photo archives, AAHS-D022006)

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Other parachutes were found in the wreckage, but not on the men. While army regulations required that parachutes be worn, it was speculated that the crew of the A-29 wasn't wearing theirs when the accident occurred.

The U.S. Army Air Corps accident investigation report (#42-2-11-4) reached the following conclusion:

The aircraft was assigned to the 1st Mapping Squadron, 1st Mapping Group, based at Bradley Field in Windsor Locks, Connecticut. At the time of the accident it was conducting a high altitude photographic mapping mission.

As part of its investigation into this accident, the army interviewed 35 witnesses. A statement issued by the accident investigation committee said in part:

"One fact of interest is the large number of witnesses who testified that they saw the right wing leave the airplane. As can be seen from the photographs, both wings were in the wreckage, the right wing being badly crumpled and apportion of it under the remains of the fuselage. The committee has found no evidence to indicated failure of the wings."

It was later determined that what witnesses likely saw was the tail section, not a wing, break away from the aircraft.

"Numerous witnesses have testified that they could see the ship trailing smoke at high altitudes. The committee believes that this so-called smoke was in reality a condensation trail left by the airplane in-so-far as no traces of fire could be found in the wreckage"

While examining the wreckage, investigators noted that both engine switches were cut, the throttle to the right engine was completely closed, while the throttle to the left engine was completely open, and the fuel selector valve for the right engine was turned off.

The right propeller appeared to have been feathered, and experts concluded that it was feathered at the time of impact.

Investigators considered the possibility that the accident was caused by a failure of the autopilot, however, the autopilot was so badly damaged that no conclusions could be drawn, only that the autopilot was in the "off" position after the accident.

Sources:

"East Granby Bomber Crash Stirs Immediate Army Probe," Newspaper clipping, Hartford Courant ?, East Granby Public Library, Local History Room, February 11, 1942.

"Body of Sixth Flyer Found in East Granby," Newspaper clipping, Hartford Courant?, East Granby Public Library, Local History Room, February 11, 1942.

Conversations with Larry Webster, Aviation Historian.

Potential Article(s) Topic

[As you are aware, this editor is constantly looking for material for the Journal. A number of suggested topics for

articles have been made, as well. The following comes from a senior AAHS member with the suggestion that someone needs to take up the "torch" and write on this subject. I agree.]

As I look back on my time here on earth, I am probably most proud of the years I spent as an employee of a small government agency called the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB). The Board was created by the Civil Aeronautics Act of 1938. Among other things, the Act directed the Board to promote air transportation in the public interest. The directive to promote was unique for its time. One of the more significant actions by the Board was the creation of the local service airline industry. These 13 carriers were provided with federal subsidies in order that small communities would have the benefit of air travel throughout the nation. The Board closely monitored the amount of federal subsidy and certificated those air carriers it found fit, willing and able to provide the service – in the public interest. This Board action brought air travel to millions of citizens with the aid of federal subsidy for these carriers. In the early years of local service, the aircraft most used was the Douglas DC-3 - many of which were modified surplus C-47s. As passenger traffic and aircraft technology grew, the Board instituted a program whereby the government would guarantee the purchase of replacement aircraft.

The foregoing is just one example of how a federal agency played a very significant role in aviation history. Congress, in its wisdom, felt that the infant air transportation industry needed stability and oversight until it reached maturity. Bear in mind that most of the consumer protection rules implemented in these early years were the result of CAB action. Also, a great note, were the CAB's adequacy of service hearings, and the most comprehensive study of airline operating costs and investment - the Domestic Passenger Fare Investigation.

I feel strongly that the CAB deserves recognition - which it has not received – for guiding an infant industry to maturity. By and large, the traveling public today is unaware of how a government agency helped nurture and guide the airline industry we have today. Consumer Reports magazine termed the years of CAB oversight the "Golden Age of Air Travel." The Airline Deregulation act of 1979 abolished the CAB. At that time the agency had 630 employees. It is not my desire to argue the merits or demerits of airline deregulation, but to fill a gap in aviation history in recognizing the role the CAB played. In the past couple of years the AAHS Journal did an article by David H. Stringer on the births of the local service airlines. Other than that, magazine literature is silent on the role of the CAB. Certainly, several text books have a chapter devoted to the CAB, but I am not aware of any in depth studies.

It is my belief that the D.O.T library still has most of the orders issued by the CAB and likely other material that would aid in putting together an article. At age 88, I am not physically and mentally up to the task and I know of no other ex-CAB employee extant capable of doing such a piece.

Norm Richards
Rockville, Maryland