

You Can't Fly Out of Here! Beckwith "Becky" Havens

By Richard Sanders Allen

The fall rains had been pelting northern Arkansas for days, and Faulkner County Fairgrounds were rapidly becoming a sodden quagmire. Delayed by swollen rivers, the Missouri-Pacific local puffed into Conway to discharge umbrella-toting fairgoers and a solitary well-dressed outlander.

This passenger, a young, straight-built fellow with a boyish face and disarming grin, eased his aching joints to the platform and headed for the hotel, and perhaps a plate of pork and grits.

By the time the stranger had finished his late breakfast and hired a hack to fetch him to the drenched fairgrounds, his presence in Conway and his mission were well known. People slogging along the sidewalks stopped to stare and to nudge one another.

"That's Him! He drives the flying machine. That's the Aye-vee-aye-tur!"

Forsaking poultry exhibits and the blandishments of the Midway barkers, the Arkansas farmers clustered about the contraption that was being assembled in the drizzle. Wheels, bamboo, framework and fabric, with an engine up behind and a broad wooden blade to propel it. That was the flying machine.

The young aye-vee-aye-tur knew from experience that he'd have to avoid the crowds. There'd been no sleeper on the train, and he needed to rest if there was to be some flying done later on.

Warily, he approached the scene of activity and stepped into a small tent reserved for tools and spare parts. No sooner had he stretched out on a canvas cot than the flap was drawn back and two mountain women unabashedly stood examining him from head to foot.



Beckwith "Becky" Havens, circa 1911-1913

After a minute of scrutiny, at last one of the females turned to her dowdy companion in disgust: "Hell," she said, "He don't look no different from anybody else!"

The recumbent birdman was Beckwith "Becky" Havens, youngest of the team of Curtiss Exhibition Flyers, who during that never-to-be-forgotten summer of 1911, undertook to show the country that powered flight was a reality.

Although the spectators perhaps expected some strange Greek God to be piloting the weird bamboo flying machine, Becky Havens nevertheless made quite an acceptable substitute. Handsome, dapper and just turned 21, he felt that flying was fun, and also an excellent way to make some money.

Bringing aviation to the people in a rush came about as a result of a chain of unpredictable events. Heavier-than-air flying of

course, dates back to December 17, 1903, when the Wright brothers first flew at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Despite this milestone and subsequent Wright flights in Ohio, newspaper apathy was widespread and the public in general neither heard nor believed that history was being made. Surprisingly, this state of affairs continued for a number of years, sanctioned in part by the pioneering Wrights themselves. They needed time to perfect their invention, and to control its features by patent protection. Their efforts in this line were understandable, but the world wouldn't wait. Hundreds of would-be flyers without the foggiest idea of aerodynamics began experiments of their own.

An expert inventor among the amateurs who tested heavier-than-air machines was Glenn H. Curtiss, a machinist and engine manufacturer from Hammondsport, New York.

Because of the secretiveness of the Wright brothers, with few people even believing such a thing as an airplane existed, the Scientific American was moved to offer a trophy for the first, straight-line flight of one kilometer before official witnesses at a pre-arranged time and place. Glenn Curtiss took this prize on July 4, 1908, and in two years progressed from that single kilometer to a sustained two-stop journey of 150 miles from Albany down the Hudson River to New York City.

The Albany-New York junket brought Curtiss new fame and a \$10,000 prize. The publicity was world-wide, and the taciturn mechanic-inventor soon found his home town a mecca for both those who wanted to buy airplanes, and those who wished to fly them.

Like Curtiss, New York-born Beckwith Havens had some experience with racing cars and liked the feel of anything fast-moving. With a pleasant personality and a gift for gab, he was just as good at selling automobiles as he was driving them. During the excitement subsequent to the Curtiss flight down from Albany, Havens was in New York for a funeral, and by a series of introductions was put in contact with Jerome Fanciulli, the Curtiss manager and agent in the big city. "Fan" took stock of the young man's qualifications and put him on the payroll. as an "airplane salesman."

Becky's first assignment was to handle the exhibit of the Curtiss Albany-New York Flyer at an auto show, and later the plane was on display in a big Broadway show room. There were a few prospects, such as Col. Jacob Ruppert, who considered the possibility of an airplane for commuting from Garrison-on-the-Hudson to his brewery. As one of the "world's first airplane salesmen" Havens tried hard, but didn't sell any aircraft. All along his primary idea had been to learn to fly.

"The first question everyone asks me is: 'How does it feel to fly?'" he told Fanciulli. "How can I sell airplanes I don't know?" Fan agreed that his young salesman should have some practical experience, and sent Becky up to Hammondsport to see Glenn Curtiss.

The meeting was not exactly auspicious. Curtiss, his mind busy on many projects, told the young New Yorker that he was starting a flying school and that he'd teach him to fly for \$500. Becky, already on the payroll, considered the price unfair, and took the first train back to the City.

Jerome Fanciulli soothed the ruffled feathers of his salesman in short order, and advanced him the money to pay for his instruction. He knew that another facet of the business, the Curtiss Exhibition Company was a wide-open field that soon would be clamoring for new pilots. All over the United States, nearly eight years after man's first flight, people were at last

beginning to take an interest in aviation. It seemed as if every state and county fair, every amusement park and travelling carnival wanted an airplane in flight as a star attraction. Both the Wright and Curtiss Exhibition companies were formed to meet the demand, and until appetites for the new and novel were satiated, did a land-office business.

Soon the little Bath & Hammondsport train again deposited a newly determined Beckwith Havens at the depot, from which he lugged his suitcase up to Mrs. Lulu Mott's boarding house. There he met a freckled-faced young naval officer, Lt. Theodore G. Ellyson, whose enjoyment of potatoes (not to mention chocolates and whiskey), had earned him the nickname "Spuds." Ellyson was the original U.S. Navy pilot, having first flown under the direction of Glenn Curtiss the previous winter.

Friendly Spuds not only shared his room at Mrs. Mott's with Becky Havens, but also the flying know-how he'd absorbed from tagging everywhere after Glenn Curtiss. On

the hot June days, it was Ellyson who explained to the would-be aviator just how it was done; Curtiss was simply too occupied with flying boat design problems, experiments, and lawsuits to do more than give a few suggestions and advice.

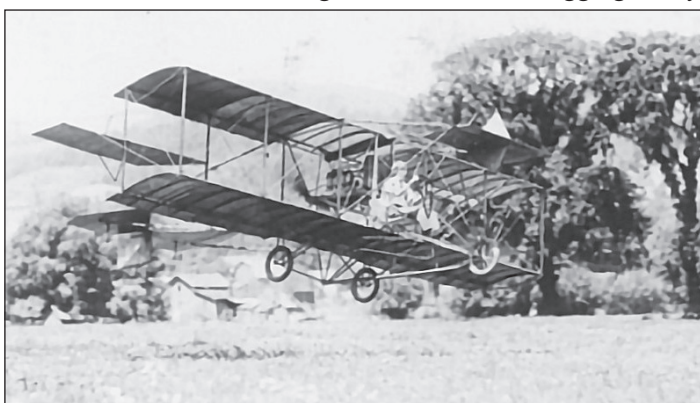
It was on a grassy field down by the shore of Keuka Lake that Becky Havens actually learned to fly, while sitting bolt upright behind the wheel of an older four-cylinder Curtiss pusher biplane that had been reconditioned.

There was no such thing as dual instruction. Becky was on his own from the start, with only shouted instructions and encouragement from Spuds Ellyson. Up and down the field he'd taxi, using more and more throttle until the fragile wings lifted the ship and she was airborne for short straight hops. Ploughing through the stubby growth of goldenrod and Queen Anne's Lace, the low-horsepower trainer sounded like a threshing machine, and this beginner's procedure became known as "grass-cutting."

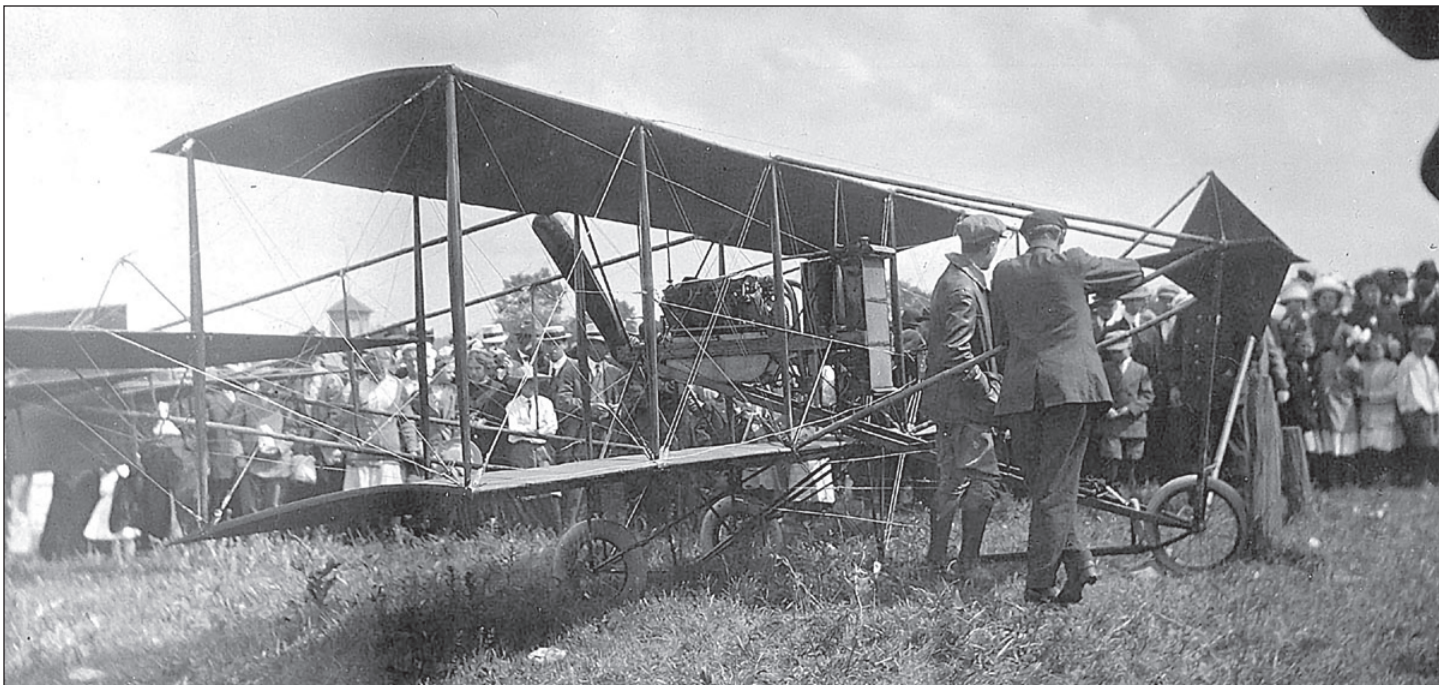
The prescribed course for early Curtiss flying students was supposed to be four hours of "grass-cutting," and then short straight hops. Becky Havens, a real "natural" in his reactions and sensitive handling was hardly airborne more than a few times before he was making turns, and in the haste of the oncoming busy season was practically accepted as a pilot overnight.

Opportunity for real work came quickly. Glenn Curtiss had a signed contract to show one of his flying machines at a big Fourth of July picnic on the fairgrounds at Batavia, New York. Young Havens and a mechanic were sent up to exhibit the plane.

"Just set it up in a tent," Curtiss told Becky. "The



Becky Havens performing a flight demonstration in his Curtiss Pusher. (Photo from the San Diego Air and Space Museum)



A view of one of Havens' Curtiss Pushers. This photo is purported to have been taken in Mansfield, Ohio, at a 1912 demonstration flown by Havens. Note that this aircraft still has the maneuvering foreplane, which was supposedly dropped after the 1911 tour. (Mansfield Lahm Regional Airport History)

machine isn't suited to fly."

All went well until mid-afternoon, when the heat and the refreshments took hold of the crowd.

"When's the aeroplane gonna fly?" they demanded.

Uneasy, Becky called the picnic committee's attention to the contract, which nowhere called for any flying, and asked protection from the crowd.

The chairman blandly surveyed him. "You're the aviator, ain't you, son? Of course we expect you to fly the aeroplane. Protection"

He looked blank and shrugged.

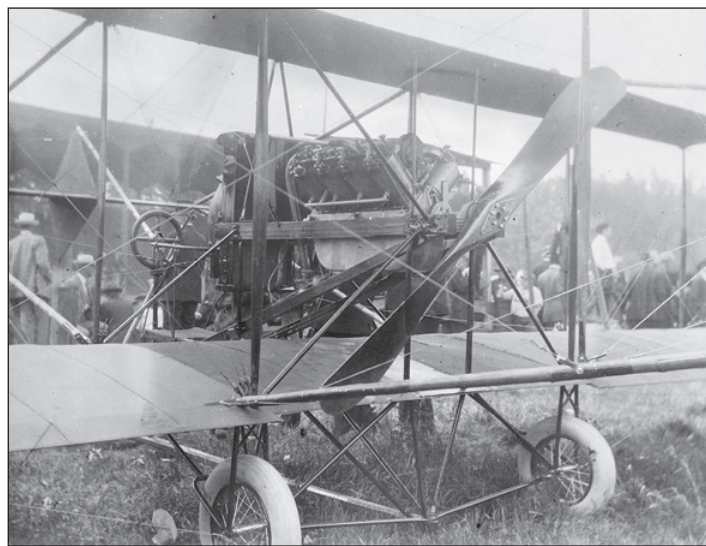
The mob was getting uglier now. Becky and his helper rolled the plane out of the tent and started the engine, hoping to mollify the unruly throng.

"Boo!" "Fake!" shouted somebody, and the chant was taken up. With all the shoving and pushing, Becky realized the plane was in danger. Desperate, he climbed up into the seat, and waved his hands to the crowd to give way.

The infield of the half-mile track shimmered in the hot sun; tree stumps and a deep drainage ditch angling across nearly midway. Becky pushed open the throttle and started rolling. His grass-cutting this time proved to be almost head-chopping.

After a short run, the biplane staggered into the air climbing above the mob. Becky, with about six feet of altitude clove a straight path between trees, sailed over the ditch and alighted with a roll that brought the plane tight up against a huge stump. Leaving the engine turning over, the flyer hopped off, picked up the front wheel and turned the light plane around. He then proceeded to fly back the way he'd come.

It was Havens' first experience with crowd behavior. They



A closeup view of the pusher showing engine, bracing and flyingwires. (Mansfield Lahm Regional Airport History)

acted as if they'd witnessed a miracle. Instead of jeers and catcalls he was amazed to be greeted with wild cheers. Hoisted on the shoulders of burly Batavians, he was carried in triumph to become guest of honor at a special late banquet in the administration building.

After this exploit of pulling triumph from near disaster, the name "Beckwith Havens" was quickly added to the roster of older and more experienced Curtiss Exhibition Flyers. His first booking came soon after the Batavia hops; an appearance at Erie,

Penn., with the famous Lincoln Beachey, already acclaimed as “King of the Exhibition Flyers.”

Trying to emulate the great Beachey, Becky tried too hard at Erie. Climbing out of a grass field surrounded by trees he found his ship on the descent despite his efforts to keep going up. Learning about a power stall the hard way, the pilot settled his bamboo bird right side up in the topmost branches of a big elm tree. Thrown off by the impact, Becky caught on a limb, and with Tarzan-like agility calmly crawled back up to shut off the still-spluttering engine. Back at the field, Beachey listened to his tale of woe, gave him a poke and said gruffly:

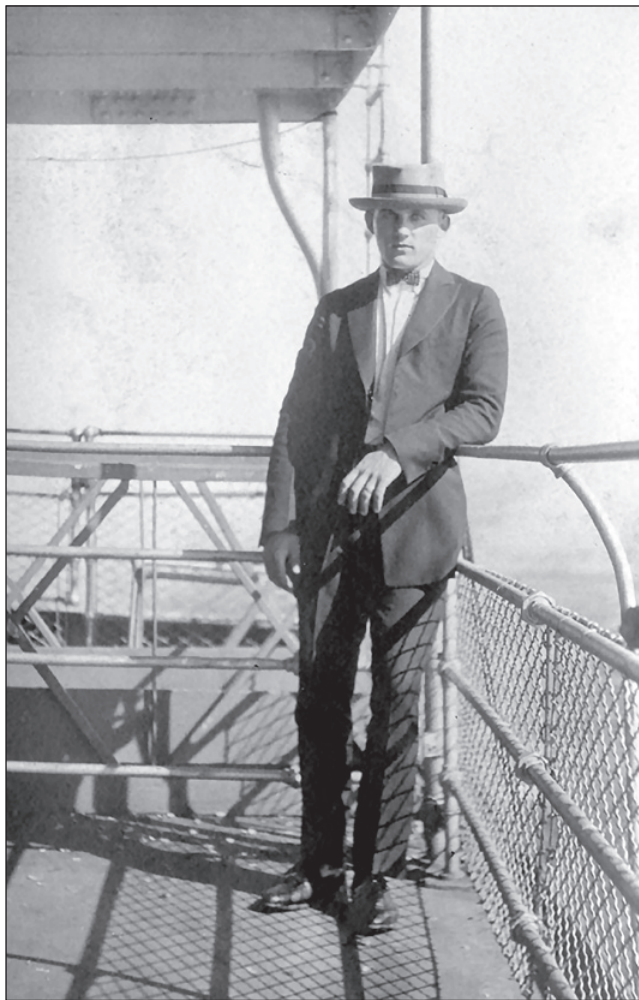
“Keep tryin’, kid!”

Despite his youth, Becky Havens was readily accepted by other Curtiss pilots whose own first flight were not made too many months before. In addition to the daredevil Beachey, there was Gene Ely (the first man to fly to and from a battleship, Eugene Godet, Jimmy Ward, Charlie Witmer, Cromwell Dixon, Hugh Robinson, Charlie Walsh – over a dozen of them. Their names are little known today, but in 1911 they were ballyhooed in big black headlines for their exhibition flying.

Acrobats, horse shows and auto racing weren’t enough for the fairs that summer. To draw crowds a real airplane, with daily flights was a MUST. Curtiss, with his excellent publicity, got the cream, and the bookings pouring into “Fan” Fanciulli’s office in New York had to be honored if there was to be any money for new Curtiss aircraft.

To be on the Curtiss Exhibition team called for many things besides flying. The aviators lived out of a suitcase, often with a sandwich in one hand and a timetable in the other. The fragile planes were not flown from one engagement to another, and had to be disassembled, boxed into two wooden and canvas crates, trundled to the depot and stowed in an express car for shipment to the next billing. There were always switches and last-minute changes of plan, with flurries of telegrams from the home office. Engine troubles, weather and both minor and major accidents upset the schedules. As the summer wore on the roster of competent pilots was tragically reduced by injury and death.

Becky Havens was fortunate to have the services of two



Havens always dressed the gentleman for his flying displays, making him quite popular with the ladies in the crowd. (Photo from Udart via Davis-Monthan Airfield Register)

of Curtiss’ best mechanics; Lew Crantz of Hammondsport and Tommy Simmons of New York City. For the young flyer these two became not only fast friends but guardians of life and limb. Time after time, Havens would arrive at a fairground or ball park to find Lew dubiously contemplating the infield. Crantz would invariably shake his head.

“Becky,” he’d say, “You can’t fly out of HERE!”

Yet somehow, Becky always did. Conferring with the management, he’d contrive to have trees cut, poles taken down and wires temporarily removed or lowered. When the grandstands were full, the little Curtiss pusher under his deft hand would go bumping over the sod, clear the track enclosure and go weaving along among any remaining obstacles.

Curtiss exhibition planes of 1911 were small, hand-built jobs composed of spruce and bamboo ribs and spars, with doped fabric wings, and bracing and control wires in seemingly every direction. Mounted on a rubber-tired tricycle landing gear, the whole ship weighed about 750 pounds empty – the greatest portion of the weight being 60-hp, water-

cooled V-8 engine.

Before each take off, Becky Havens would always inspect his ship, and personally adjust the carburetor until the roar of the engine denoted what seemed the best tune to his ears. His seat in the pusher was right out in the open for all to see. His high-laced shoes were firmly implanted on the rudder pedals and his shoulders tucked beneath the leather straps that held him close to the pads to activate the ailerons. Between his knees was the metal control column, topped by a big wooden wheel to grip. Directly behind his perch was the heavy square radiator, and then the rackety engine. There was no sleek cabin enclosure, no instruments to rely on; just a confident man and his flying machine.

All during that summer, Curtiss planes were equipped with an ungainly horizontal control plane out in front of the pilot. Later it was discovered that this extra control was unnecessary, and actually made the ship harder to fly, but Becky struggled along with his all during that first year.

When it came to money, if a young man could fly an airplane

in 1911, and had the equipment with which to do it, his income was limited only by the number of engagements he was able to fill. Prices ranged from the usual \$500 for 30 minutes of flying to as much as \$3,500 for a special appearance. The money went to the Curtiss organization that supplied the planes, but Becky Havens got 25%, and later 50% of the fees.

Havens was never one of the flamboyant, clenched-cigar, reversed cap-goggles-and-leather-jacket group of flyers. Always impeccably dressed, he preferred an ordinary business suit with starched white collar and black tie. For practical purposes, he sometimes donned a football helmet, heavy gloves and snowy white tennis shoes.

During the 1911 exhibition season Becky flew in 13 states. Due to the high casualties among the Curtiss aviators (for a time they were being hurt or killed at the rate of one a month), he was sometimes hard put to fill dates. After flying at Lewiston, Maine, in July, he was sent to the mid-west for appearances at Rockford, Ill., Boone, Iowa, Conway, Ark., and Muscogee, Oklahoma. September found him in Wisconsin.

Every landing was of course dead-stick, made without power. The pilot would cut the engine switch, volplane (i.e., descend without power) down over any obstructions and level off to settle on the tricycle wheels with no springs or shock absorbers of any kind. The only brake was an ineffectual piece of wood that was supposed to be jammed up against the front tire. In order to bring up short in small fields, Becky Havens worked out a scheme where the two mechanics would run out and grab the wings and hang on, while he himself jumped out of the seat and added his weight to drag the plane to a stop. At Ashland, Wis., this trick tried in an infield full of rocks got them all badly bruised. Later a rope stretched in the path of the rolling airplane proved effective until a too-zealous volunteer group held it too taut and cut the pilot's shin to the bone.

At Chippewa Falls, Wis., Becky had a near one. He was climbing out of a fairground over town in a high wind when a propeller extension shaft let go. With the whirling prop cutting the plane in two. Havens thought it best to try for landing in

the street below. Gliding to earth he was suddenly wrenched up short by two newly-strung street light wires.

The despised front control softened the initial impact. Then the wires snapped the steel control column in the pilot's hands to gently bind him to the radiator.

The committee from the fair rushed over expecting to find a mangled aviator. Instead, there was Havens standing in the street below his bashed-up bird, totting up the damage with pencil and paper. The plane was a complete wreck, and Becky had to wire Hammondsport for a replacement to meet him at this next date down in Kansas.

People still wouldn't believe that an airplane could fly. At Enid, Okla., Havens had a Sunday one-day stand sponsored by a newspaper. The editor invited the young flyer to lunch and during the course of the meal mentioned that another aviator had stopped by the year before.

"He couldn't fly because of the high wind," remarked the editor, "and the people sure were sore!"

Just at that moment the front door of the house flew open and a picture blew off the wall.

Upset, but game as always, Becky proceeded to the bleachers erected on the prairie outside of town. As usual, Lew Crantz's words were the same, only nearly unintelligible in the howl of the gale.

"Becky, you can't fly out of HERE!"

Havens was beginning to believe himself. To stall for time, and also to check for any hidden prairie dog holes, he walked away from the grumbling, crowd, impatient to see a flight. He'd not gone far when he heard a horse and buckboard come rumbling after him. It was the local sheriff, and old-time Indian fighter with only one leg.

"Son," he said, "are you going to fly?"

"Yes, Sir," replied Becky, with a confidence he didn't feel in the face of the hostile crowd.

The sheriff pile him onto the buckboard and high-tailed back to the bleachers. Perched on his good leg he motioned for silence and the bellowed:

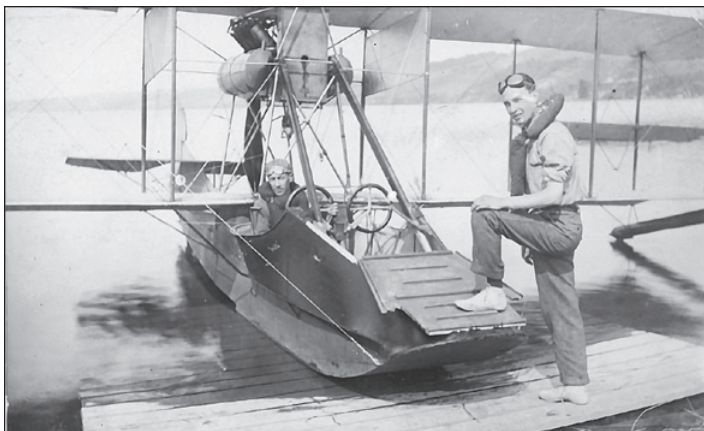
"Folks, give this boy a chance. This is his last ride before



Minor mishaps were closer to the rule than the exception, with crashes due to various causes also taking a toll on machines and aviators. Here it appears that the aircraft didn't achieve sufficient speed to clear the fence and tree and settled back on its tail on the fence. (Photo from San Diego Air and Space Museum)



At the Texas State Fair in Dallas, Tex., in 1911, Havens' became one of the earliest known aerial photographers when, with the help of a local news photographer a Kodak camera was mounted (lower right portions of the photo) on the leading edge, allowing Havens to snap one photo on each flight he made around the area. (Photo from Wikipedia commons)



Havens' airplane on a body of water in early 1913, possibly the Hudson River. (Photo from Udart via Davis-Monthan Airfield Register)

he rides with the undertaker.”

The crowd laughed and the cries of “fake!” subsided. Gingerly, Becky climbed into his seat on the pusher, and despite the high wind, made the first flight the Oklahomans had ever seen.

By far the biggest event of the circuit was the Texas State Fair in Dallas. Eugene Ely had been slated to take the date, but when he was killed in Georgia, the Curtiss Exhibition Co., sent Becky Havens. The fair was so large that it even had an aviation committee headed by W.G. Crush, general passenger agent for the K.&T. Railroad. The committee said that they simply wanted people to see an airplane in flight, and had promised the premium price of \$700 a day for 30 minutes of flying.

This was so different from the Roman holiday attitude at most fairs that Becky could scarcely believe it. On his first hop he essayed a few mild turns and dives, only to be reprimanded by Judge Crush “for risking his life.” The judge really meant it, and the grateful flyer was happy to go sailing around in a simple circle over the fairgrounds for the rest of his Dallas stay.

An added feature of the Havens' flights at the Texas State Fair was his role as a pioneer aerial cameraman. John Minor, a Dallas newspaper photographer, mounted a folding Kodak camera at the leading edge of the pusher's lower wing. On each flight Becky squeezed a bulb attachment, the shutter clicked and one picture was taken. The resulting aerial views are some of the first news photos ever taken from an airplane.

The flyer got a nice surprise at the conclusion of his flights over Dallas. With the approval of the committee, Judge Crush presented him with a \$700 bonus check in recognition of his safe flying.

Houston, not to be outdone by Dallas, put on an “Aviation Meet” the next month. For this not one, but three Curtiss Aviators were supplied by the company. Havens was joined by Eugene Godet, a French mechanic turned flyer, and Charlie Walsh, whose wife traveled with him and stood petrified every minute he was off the ground.

Enjoying perfect weather, these three gave Houston



Beckwith Havens with Curtiss seaplane on the Hudson River (?), Ca. 1913 (?) (Photo from Udart via Davis-Monthan Airfield Register))

an aerial exhibition that a delegation of jaded traveling men conceded was “sure some show!”

For five days the Curtiss aviators droned over Houston. They made 10-mile cross-country flights against time, simulated a bombing raid, flew the mail, and indulged in hare-and-hounds chases through the Texas skies. Their finale each day consisted of circling, diving and volplaning with all three ships in the air at once.

To bring out the ladies, Becky Havens engaged in one of his specialties; flying low over the grandstand and tossing out carnations. The belles of Houston tumbled in unladylike rushes to snatch such a favor from the gallant birdman clattering overhead.

Young, unmarried and “exceedingly handsome” as reported by the Houston Post, Havens was a crowd favorite. Godet, Walsh and all the mechanics treated him like a kid brother and worried about him when he flew.

When it came to mail carrying, Becky had already qualified on one of his earliest flights. Filling a date with Lincoln Beachey at Fort Smith, Ark., the pair was given 400 pounds of mail to transport from the fairgrounds to the local post office. Becky flew over the building and dropped his sack sedately in a vacant lot alongside. Beachey, wanting to be different made an early example of the principles of dive bombing. His mail pouch tore a hole in the metal roof. The experimental mail flight of

November 6, 1911, was made only three weeks after the first official trip of this nature in the United States.

Later in November, Havens became Georgia's first air mail pilot. During an exhibition in Savannah, he carried a sack aloft for the mile run between the ball park and the main post office.

It was also at Savannah that Becky participated in one of the first races between an airplane and an automobile. Appearing over the grandstands, he flew for 20 minutes with low passes over the track, trying to pace a big Lozier race car driven by Ralph Mulford. Because of a high wind, Becky couldn't get up much speed, and it was generally conceded that this time at least, the automobile was the faster vehicle.

Curtiss Exhibition Co. dates at Columbus and Albany, Ga., brought an end of the year's flying for most of the pilots. Shipping his faithful pusher to Cuba, Becky Havens topped his first and best season with a final triumphal flight, the first over the City of Havana.

It would never be quite the same again. By this time the public had come to believe powered heavier-than-air flight was indeed a reality. From then on crowds were not content with merely seeing an airplane, and the miracle of manned flight. Competition between flyers became a contest to see who could provide the greatest and most death-defying thrill-packed maneuvers.

For two more years Becky Havens continued to fill Curtiss Exhibition Co. dates, but the bloom was off the rose. He found himself more and more attracted to the hydro-airplanes that Glenn Curtiss had devised. These offered far greater choice of landing spots, and could carry passengers.

In April, 1913 Havens was back in Hammondsport ready for a new season, along with Charles Niles, Gink Doherty, Charles Hamilton and others. During that year the flying boat really came into its own and the early spring student class was comprised largely of wealthy sportsmen who then had, or later purchased, a plane for their personal use. In that first flying boat class were such renowned names as L.A. Vilas, J.B.R. Verplanck, Marshall Reid, Harold McCormick, G.M. Heckscher, R.V. Morris and others who went on to fame in early American aviation history. Havens signed up for exhibition flying again, but soon became the flying boat instructor when Francis Wildman was sent to Europe on a test mission. Wildman returned from Europe in late May to take over the instruction and on May 30 Havens flew his first exhibition of the season at Poughkeepsie, New York.

After filling a few other dates in the east, Havens returned to Hammondsport where he was selected to fly Verplanck's new Flying Boat in Percy Noel's AERO and HYDRO Great lakes Reliability Cruise, starting from Chicago July 8, 1913. This watercraft race was from Chicago to Detroit, Mich., via the Straits of Mackinac following the shore line of the Great Lakes. The Curtiss Company pinned their faith on Havens to win this event. Already well experienced in water flying on Curtiss machines he would be a hard man to beat. Verplanck would accompany him as a passenger for the event. Other starters in the contest were: Tony Jannus in a Benoist Flying Boat carrying Paul McCullough; Walter Johnson in a Thomas Flying

Boat carrying Earl Beers; Glenn Martin in a Martin Aeroyacht carrying Charles Day and Roy Francis in a Paterson-Francis Flying Boat carrying James "Sky High" Irving. Weldon Cooke and L.A. Vilas were also entered but did not participate.

Havens and Verplanck not only won, but were the only finishers after severe weather knocked out most of the other competitors. This journey was the first to traverse the shores of all the Great Lakes after Havens continued on to Buffalo from Detroit. He and Verplanck subsequently joined up in Albany to make the first non-stop flight down the Hudson to New York.

Havens spent the winter months of 1913-1914 in Cuba and the West Indies where he enjoyed a good vacation of fishing and duck hunting. While there, Mr. Chenevert contacted Havens extending an invitation to become a salesman for Federal Trucks, and after some consideration Havens decided to quit flying and accept this offer.

Being bachelors, they conceived the idea of fitting out a truck with living quarters and making a world tour as a joint trip for pleasure and selling trucks. They built the truck and started out from Detroit heading west. All went according to plan until they reached California and were preparing to ship out to Asia, when they received a wire from the factory demanding that they abandon the trip and return to Detroit. The war in Europe was gaining headway and the company management wanted them to get over there and promote their truck business.

As a result, they went to Europe and sold trucks in substantial numbers to practically all of the European countries. Federal Truck Company grew rapidly, new capital came in and the name was changed to the Denby Truck Company.

Though he both flew and sold landplanes for over 40 years, the high points of Becky Havens' subsequent career in aviation involved flying boats, seaplanes and amphibians. His was the first flight across Long Island Sound, and the first from Chicago to New York City via the waterways. In accomplishing the latter, he won the Great Lakes Race, skirting the coast of Michigan from Chicago to Detroit by way of Mackinac. Medals and awards came to him for his flying boat accomplishments of 1913.

Havens remained in Europe until the early part of 1918 when he was virtually drafted by the U.S. Government to return and fly water planes for the Navy. Entering the Naval Air Service he became U.S. Naval Aviator No. 524, and for some time was a flying boat instructor at the Naval Air Station, Hampton Roads, Virginia. From there he was transferred to Chief Test Pilot at the Anacostia Air Base, Washington, D.C. Immediately after WWI Havens returned to Europe on Denby Truck export activities.

In 1920 Havens returned from Europe to again join Curtiss, as District Manager in charge of sales promotion activities throughout the State of New York, and the New York Aircraft Corp. was formed to aid in developing interest in the various uses of aircraft. In 1921 Havens joined his former flying colleague Charles C. Witmer to form the Airship Manufacturing Company of America in Hammondsport, N.Y., to develop and manufacture all types of lighter-than-air craft and accessories. In December 1923, Witmer resigned from the firm due to ill



A Loening OA-1C, 28-79, similar to the aircraft that Havens made the first transcontinental flight in an amphibian aircraft in 1928. (Photo from the Gerald Balzer collection)

health, and another former Curtiss pilot, J.L. Callan, bought out Witmer's interest in the firm, at which time the name was changed to Airships, Inc., with Havens remaining as Vice President and Treasurer.

In January 1928, Havens took a leave of absence from Airships, Inc. to act as Sales Manager for the Loening Aeronautical Engineering Corporation of New York. In March he was a passenger and copilot with Lt. B.R. Dallas on the first amphibian flight from New York City to Rockwell Field, San Diego, Calif., flying a standard service Loening amphibian with a Liberty-12 inverted engine. The 3,300 miles was covered in 32 hours, 45 minutes flying time, by way of Dayton, Ohio, Amarillo and El Paso, Tex., and Tucson, Arizona.

In 1931 Havens became a Special Representative with the Vacuum Oil Company and later that year joined the Fairchild Aviation Corp. as a Factory Representative for northeastern United States. Following this Havens was the Fairchild distributor for 10 years at Roosevelt Field, Long Island, part of the time in association with Richard Depew. On September 25, 1937, Havens again flew his first passenger, John Dibert, across Long Island Sound in a Fairchild to celebrate the 25th anniversary of their first flight in 1912.

During WWII Havens again served his country as Commander of the Naval Air Base at San Julian, Cuba. In 1946 he served as Director of aircraft sales for the Embry-Riddle Company of Miami, Florida. On October 7, 1948, Havens made a 35th Anniversary Flight from Albany to New York City, carrying Mrs. Havens and Archibald Brown, in a 4-place

Aeronca cabin plane on floats. On October 8, 1953, he made a similar flight to mark the 40th anniversary, again carrying Mrs. Havens and Mr. Brown, in a 4-place Cessna on floats.

Havens retired to live quietly in a New York City apartment. He had witnessed the whole pageant of half a century of aviation progress, and still avidly kept up with the latest developments, particularly the personally-flown light planes with which he had so long been associated.

It all began that hectic summer of 1911. Looking back, Becky would muse that it was a rough, tough life, But the he would say:

“... But it was fun! Four or five nights a week on a train. Crowds, crowds, crowds, so unfriendly, ready to call “fake” – until they saw you fly. People staring, mud, dust, sawdust smells and raucous music, barkers. Each field looking worse than the last and Lew Crantz always trying to persuade you not to try it. Each flight might be the last.

“My palms would be so wet I’d carry a handkerchief. But I knew that when the big brass band blared out a tune, I’d be pushing that throttle wide, and forget everything but flying that plane and getting over those trees.”

His 1960 book *Reminiscences of Beckwith Havens*, recounts many of his experiences as a pioneer aviator.

Beckwith Havens passed away on May 9, 1969, in New York City, N.Y., at the age of 79. ➔

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