

MAIL SACK

OSCAR SOLBRIG'S AIRPLANE AT NEW MUSEUM

I noticed a short article about Oscar Solbrig's airplane, in the Davenport (Iowa) Daily Times of Oct. 17th, 1961. It states:

A 1914 model Benoist which hung from the ceiling of the Davenport Public Museum for 37 years...is among "friends", other airplanes of the same vintage at the new National Antique Air Museum and Hall of Fame in Wichita, Kansas. It is being assembled and displayed there by the curator of the Museum, Mr. Louis Anderson.

Solbrig was one of the earliest barnstormers in the pioneer days of aeronautics...The plane, which cost \$4,000 new, actually had a short flying life. He used it until 1917...Soon after that it was put in storage in the attic of his family home until it went to the Davenport Museum.

Robert H. Scheppler, 2645 Fillmore Lane, Davenport, Iowa

(Member E. D. "Hud" Weeks sent in the photographs shown with the following information:)

Solbrig/Benoist Biplane, Mansfield, Mo., Nov. 1961 after restoration by E. Louis Anderson. Power is a 4 cyl. Roberts 2 Cycle. The engine and propeller are in A-1 shape. Restoration was for display only, however. The wheels, tires, many fittings, landing gear wood, most of the wires would have to be replaced to bring the ship to flight condition.

A 1915 photo of the ship in Solbrig's papers climbing steeply out of a pasture indicate it was a real performer. A newsclip states Solbrig bought it second hand in Chicago. Its possible he built this Benoist from a Chicago crackup or from parts ordered from Benoist nearby in St. Louis about 1915.

Solbrig's widow told me, in an interview before she died in 1952, that it was a Benoist. She stored it after his death from natural causes in 1930. It was later hung high off the ceiling in a private museum, an old church in Davenport, where no one could examine it until Anderson took it down when the museum folded.

It is on loan only to the City of Wichita. It is owned by Mrs. Ruth Adams, his daughter.

E. D. Weeks, Box 1576, Des Moines 6, Iowa.

Below - at left, the Solbrig/Benoist biplane after restoration in 1961 by Louis Anderson and, at right, an early photo of the original. (The beer sign was not on the airplane but was added to the printed postcard photographs sold as souvenirs. (Photos- Weeks Coll.)



MAIL SACK



MISS STRATOSPHERE

Can someone supply me with the details concerning the accompanying photograph of the Lockheed 8D Special, once owned by C. D. Chamberlin? It was called Chamberlin's MISS STRATOSPHERE. For what purpose was this aircraft intended, and what was the reason for the modified cockpit?

Robert C. Mikesch, 5612 Elmendorf Dr., S.E. Washington 23, D.C.

FLOTATION BAGS ON WILDCAT

Congratulations on the "Wildcat" story in the Winter 1961 Journal. It cleared up certain misconceptions that have been gaining widespread currency including the one that FM-2 was equipped with a turbo-supercharger.

I saw with interest that U.S.N. decided to remove the flotation bags. Captain Eric Brown in his book, Wings on My Sleeve, (published, 1961, by Arthur Barker) records that on two occasions the flotation bags got him out of trouble, when he crashed landed in a "Martlet" in a reservoir and when he crashed landed in the sea. Another pilot's life was saved by the device when in the course of a landing on the H.M.S. EMPIRE AUDACITY, probably the first C.V.E. built) in heavy seas the "Martlet" crashed overboard. The bags inflated and the pilot was picked up without difficulty. This makes one wonder whether it would not have been better to leave the flotation bags in the aircraft, provided of course that a suitable modification was possible to prevent recurrence of the incident referred to in the article.

According to Thetford's book and the articles in the Air Pictorial, both referred to in the article, the following were the serial numbers of the Martlets and



Wildcats supplied to the United Kingdom:-

Type	S/N	No.	
"Martlet I" (G36A)	AL231 - AL262	32	AL231 - AL235 supplied to Canada.
	AX725 - AX738	14	
	AX824 - AX829	6	
	BJ507 - BJ527	21	
	BJ554 - BJ570	17	
	BJ447 - BJ456	10	These were lost at sea.
"Martlet II" (G36A)	AJ100 - AJ153	54	Delivered direct to the Far East.
	AM964 - AM999	36	
"Martlet III" (F4F - 3A)	AM954 - AM963	10	
"Wildcat IV" (F4F - 4B)	FN100 - FN319	220	
"Wildcat V" (FM - 1)	JV325 - JV636	312	
"Wildcat VI: (FM - 2)	JV637 - JV924	288	
	JW785 - JW836	52	
	JZ860 - JZ889	30	

M.A. Bradley, 29 Marshall Ave., Kew E. 4, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

OBSERVATIONS

A letter of, I hope, constructive criticism. I hope it will be taken as such, and definitely don't want it to effect the competent work being done. HOWEVER,

1. I have had "wanteds" published, which generated a single (very satisfying) reply. If this is an indication of reader response to "wants and disposals", suggest it be dropped, for better use of space. A small complaint.

2. A real deep one here: after attending several get-togethers, I have a sincere feeling that the desire to fulfill the mission of the organization is being slighted by a caste of "ins" (persons who are really interested only in gathering masses of data/photos, which are their objectives) who often reject untapped sources because the source is a person who is an "outsider" (persons* who don't collect masses of data/photos, etc.) It would seem that the now-in-their-50's and -40's pilots/engineers/mechanics et al who are still mentally alert and with (fading?) memories (but authentic log books/albums) should be tapped by the really active historian. After all, WWII was 20 years ago! For instance, I know quite a few boys who could have salted that excellent story on Grumman with tidbits on the F4F (no mention of the exercise involved, not in retracting the L.G., but in charging those 6 .50 cal. guns) and how the F8F did have break-off tips (I lost one over a tow-sled; they later were triggered to both "gd"). However, not being an "in" type, this stuff will disappear when we do, while the same masses of data/serial numbers/photos will be pawed over, to wind up in some 1990 publication.

H.S. Packard, 15210 Runnymede, Van Nuys, California.

*persons who are pilots? A neglected area, probably due to their subjective, not objective, knowledge of the aircraft?

MANLY-BALZER ENGINE

I have enjoyed reading Harvey Lippincott's important paper, "The Navy Gets an Engine". It is all too seldom that a good engine history is published, yet without a means of propulsion we would only be able to float or glide through the air.

Recently I have been studying the history of the Manly-Balzer engines, and therefore have a few addi-

tions to add to this section of Mr. Lippincott's paper.

The label on the Balzer four wheeled "automobile" reads in part: "Balzer 1894 - This little experimental carriage, presented to the Museum by its builder in 1899, is powered with a rotary, 3-cylinder, 4-cycle, air-cooled, gasoline engine - gift of Stephen M. Balzer". This engine, therefore, predated that of F. O. Farwell.

It is interesting to realize that this "automobile" arrived with a spare engine which Balzer gave to Manly in 1899, and which was used to rotate propellers for test purposes in connection with the full scale Langley Aerodrome.

I think the statement, "Unfortunately Balzer was unable to produce workable engines" should be modified slightly in view of the following quotation based on original source material.

"On May 6, 1900 Manly visited Balzer in New York City to find out exactly what had been accomplished, and to see what might be done to improve the engine's efficiency. He immediately tested the engine and found it producing only 4 H.P., and even this low output could only be maintained for a few minutes. After working on the problem for several weeks, Manly succeeded in obtaining a continuous rating of 8 H.P. @ 350 R.P.M. This being only 2/3 of the necessary power, the project was abandoned."

Robert B. Meyer, Jr., 9710 Persimmon Tree Road, Bethesda 14, Md.

CURTISS FLYING BOAT IN DANISH NAVAL SERVICE

I am writing in response to the inquiry of yours published in the current issue of the AAHS JOURNAL, Vol. 6, No. 3, (Fall, 1961) p.207. Seeing the picture you provided struck my eye instantly as an old friend, as I not only participated in the design of this airplane in 1918/1919 but flew it extensively all during the twenties.

Starting in 1917 I was employed, at engineering work chiefly, by the Curtiss Co., later Curtiss-Wright, for some 34 years or until they went out of the airplane/airframe business.

Enclosed I supply you with a copy of the official A & M Co. Characteristics sheet of the airplane in question, a Curtiss "Seagull". The Curtiss was a commercial (4 place) development of a U.S. Navy trainer (2 place) called the "MF", and that in turn meant "modified F", the "F" boat being the first Curtiss boat produced in quantity.

George A. Page, Jr., Reynoldsburg, Ohio

Characteristics Sheet

Curtiss C-6 Biplane Passenger Carrying Flying Boat, Built 1920.

Aerofoil Section USA-1

Dimensions: Length, overall 28 ft. 10-3/16 in.
Height, overall 11 ft. 9-7/32 in.
Span, overall 50 ft. 2 in.

Power Plant: One Curtiss C-6 160 HP at 1750 RPM
Fuel Capacity 43 U.S. Gallons
Oil Capacity 5 U.S. Gallons
Propeller Curtiss Wood, diam.8'0"

Weights: Empty 1911 lbs.
Gross 2726 lbs.

Performance: High Speed 76.5 mph @ sea level
Landing Speed 48.5 mph @ sea level
Cruising Speed 60 mph @ sea level
Rate of Climb 260 ft/min
Endurance @ econ. RPM 4.8 hrs.
Service Ceiling 5900 ft.
Absolute 7000 ft.

NAVY'S FIRST FIGHTER

The article "Navy's First Fighter," in Vol. 6, No. 4, was very good. Some additional notes on this machine may also be of interest. On pages 232-3 of Woodhouse's Textbook of Applied Aeronautic Engineering (The Century Co., New York, 1920) are two pictures of the Navy's float machine and one of a "Curtiss Model H-A Mail Machine." This aircraft, a land plane, marked number 251, appears to be a single seater with the pilot placed aft.

Some 1918 data on the Liberty powered machine differs from that given in the AAHS article: chord 70"; sweepback 4 deg; dihedral (upper) + 3 deg, (lower) -1 deg; total wing area (incl ailerons) 380 sq ft; empty and gross weights 2615 and 3725 lbs respectively; max speed was given as only 123 mph at sea level and a dismal 87 mph at 2000 ft.

In 1922 one HA was entered in the Curtiss Marine Trophy race. The Navy PRO handout stated that:

"The HA is a Curtiss designed and built seaplane brought out in 1918 as an answer to high performance German seaplanes . . . Due to change in conditions the HA type was never put into production, and the sample plane, tested in 1918, has been reconditioned and entered in the Curtiss Marine Trophy Race, but fitted with a special high compression Liberty engine. A special high compression Liberty is a standard Liberty engine with high compression pistons and new valves and should develop over 420 hp on blended fuel. The machine was designed by Mr. W.L. Gilmore of the Curtiss Aeroplane & Motor Corp. in cooperation with Major B.L. Smith, USMC. Pilot: A.J. Williams, Ens., USN."

Technical data given out at this time included these about the HA: span (both) 42'-0"; length OA 30'-9"; height 11'-5"; gap 6'-0"; chord 74"; incidence and dihedral none; wing area 490 sq ft; airfoil "Sloane"; gross weight 3626 lbs; top speed 132.8 mph; and stalling speed 51.2 mph. This is the latest date that I've seen the HA mentioned.

Jesse D. Thompson, 5321 Flamingo Court, Dayton 31, Ohio

NOTES ON U.S. ARMY & USAF FIGHTERS

Let me pass along a few observations on Harborough's latest book United States Army and Air Force Fighters, 1916-1961: The book is generally very good and anyone who is interested in the subject should have it. There are few errors and it is a veritable gold mine of information. For the buff, there are some shortcomings. In Part I there appears some lack of real familiarity and understanding of the history of the development of the "Pea Shooter" in the U.S.--Otherwise it just would not have been written the way it is. Also the discussion does not follow a logical order (chronological, numerical by type, or by manufacturer) so it is confusing and sometimes misleading because one does not see the competitive development of the various types.

The following points relate mostly to the 1920-39 period.

Pg. 18 - The Eng. Div. was building a/c as late as 1923. There is little evidence that the industry greatly feared this as competition. What they really fought was the A.S. practice of buying the design and then awarding production contracts to the lowest bidder, e.g., Orenco "D" and MB-3, etc.

Pg. 25 - The A.S. originally intended to spread the MB-3 contract among several firms and industry knew it. Boeing's bid for the entire lot was so low the Air Service couldn't afford not to accept it. The protests from Curtiss and others were fully justified.

Pg. 28 - In the development of a follow on type for the MB-3 several points should be remembered. Of the early

PW types evaluated the PW-1 was the only one to show promise of being an acceptable pursuit. In fact Gen. Mitchell directed McCook Field to start action to put the PW-1 into production. Alfred Verville advised that the PW-1 was obsolete and recommended that a new design be procured. This resulted in the PW-8 vs. PW-9 evaluation. The PW-9 incorporated several features of the PW-1 (tapered wings, tunnel radiator, etc--points not unnoticed by McCook personnel who considered them desirable) whereas the PW-8 represented a different approach. The McCook report recommended that the contract be given to Boeing. The official files indicate that the Curtiss influence in Washington outweighed the McCook recommendation and the contract was awarded to Curtiss. However, it should be remembered that Curtiss did have a good record and Boeing had gotten the fat MB-3 contract. At any rate McCook still pressed for the PW-9 and when more money was available some PW-9's were ordered. Experience proved McCook to be right in that the PW-9 was a more serviceable airplane.

Pg. 156 - (also Pg. 243) The XP-9 was test flown 26 Nov. 1930 by Lt. Crocker.

Pg. 221 - The Thomas-Morse MB-6 was designated R-2.

Pg. 241 - The PW-1B began as the PW-2 and its designation was later changed to PW-1B. It had no connection with the Loening PW-2. The Engineering Division PW-2 (later redesignated PW-1B) had the fuselage of the PW-1. The Loening PW-2 had a completely different fuselage.

Pg. 256 - The role prefix "TF" designated the two-seat version of a fighter which is normally a single seater.

(On Page 41, of the Magazine Guns & Ammunition for March 1962, is an illustration of the two Lewis machine guns mounted on the Curtiss S-3 triplane).

In summary, my only real gripe is that it should have had three times as many pages!

Jesse D. Thompson, 5321 Flamingo Court, Dayton 31, Ohio

AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL MEMBERS

Re: A.A.H.S. Negative Library. By Roger Besecker

When the A.A.H.S. Negative Library was started I had high hopes for it. However, the response from Members has been far from what was expected. There have been many requests for use of the negatives donated, but not as many donations to the library as desired. Indeed, from the enthusiastic replies received when I originally proposed the idea, I assumed that a large number of Members would both contribute to and make use of the library.

It is intended that this library should be built from extra or unwanted negatives, those the Members do not need (as being outside their own sphere of interest). But others may wish to borrow these, and I feel that this project deserves a more wholehearted response. The cataloguing is relatively easy. Also, the correspondence with lenders or borrowers is most welcome. I do not mind supplying the negative envelopes (which are seldom enclosed, nor paying the postage when it is not included.) It is a small cost for keeping the library in operation.

One thought should be kept in mind. Peter Bowers asked, in a recent MAIL SACK letter, "What will happen to your collection if something happens to you?" What better way is there to record history, and to disseminate it, than through a central negative lending library, open to all Members.

The question is, do the Members want this? I, personally, do not want to quit, but the results thus far are disappointing. If you, the Members, are for the library, then get behind it and support it. Write your opinion to me, or to the Editor.

Roger F. Besecker, 1349 N. Wahneta, Allentown, Pa.

PROBLEMS AND ANTICIPATED PROBLEMS

Re: The Negative Lending Library

A quick scan of the aircraft negatives listed as being on hand in the A.A.H.S. Negative Lending Library raises some questions in my mind and prompts comment on situations that may not be a problem now but which are apt to become serious in the future.

First, consistency in nomenclature is necessary. Negative D-46 is listed as Boeing XB-17 and D-54 and D-55 are listed as Curtiss "Hawk 75" X-17Y. There never was a Boeing XB-17. The B-17 designation wasn't even assigned until service test models were ordered as YB-17 some time after the bomber competition of August, 1935. The prototype that Boeing built for that competition was still Boeing-owned and was flown as the Boeing B-299 with civil registration X-13372 and illegitimate Army Air Corps markings. Collectors, aviation writers, and even Air Force officials have retroactively called that airplane the "XB-17". The same situation prevailed with the Curtiss 75 entered in the 1935/36 fighter competitions. It, too, was a company-owned airplane flying with civil registration as did the Boeing, but for some reason it was called by its proper factory model number and not a fictitious military designation of "XP-36". Here we have a case of two civil aircraft submitted to the Service as prototypes, one of which has the correct civil designation and one a non-existent military one. How is the collector of future years who may not know the score in these particular cases going to order a desired picture?

Second, when the list gets a lot longer, how is the customer going to find a particular subject? Things seem to be in numerical order in sequence of receipt, for a Boeing PB-1W appears (with civilian registration) at L-14 and there are more with military serials down in D-47/49. Maybe, several thousand negatives from now, some more PB-1's will be added. Is the collector interested specifically in just PB-1's going to have to scan the entire listing of many thousands just to find all six PB-1's that may be on it? (See Editor's note below.) An associated problem is the fact that there is no separation of the subject aircraft by status or branch of service, as Army/USAF, Navy, civil, WW-1, etc., the way most collectors seem to subdivide their collections. There is not even the convenience of grouping alphabetically by manufacturer, regardless of nationality, date, or branch of service. Finally, and I guess this is one that no one will ever be able to agree on completely, is the manner of designating the views. For example, where does one draw the line between a LF (left front) view and the adjacent LS (for left side) view.

I do want to put up a strong argument for arrangement of the negatives on file in some order where a desired subject can be found quickly instead of by long scanning, and for establishment of some check on the accuracy of designations. The time to do it is NOW, before the file gets so big that reorganization will be impossible. One further suggestion - have the contributors submit as much data with each negative as possible as to when and where it was taken, and other pertinent facts.

Peter M. Bowers, 13826 Des Moines Way, Seattle 88, Wash.

EDITOR'S NOTE

As part sponsor of this negative library I wish to say that cataloguing, completely, is intended, but at the moment is not necessary. When the number of negatives becomes sufficient the list will be revised as to country, manufacturer, branch of service and type.

Re the LF vs. LS controversy, this has never been clearly established - how can it? But at least it makes more sense to say LF or LS than it did to say 1/4F or 3/4F. In the latter system one could not

tell whether it was 1/4 (left) F or 1/4 (right) F.

James J. (John) Sloan, 205 Silver Way, Grass Valley, Calif.

AIR RELIC PRESERVATION

There are several A.A.H.S. Members like myself who are also members of Air-Britain. It is those who might be interested in air-relic preservation that I would like to contact.

The Air-Britain air-relic research group, formed recently, is currently trying to compile notes on all preserved or converted military aircraft in the world (manufactured before 1950). They have become very successful in their attempts to save any veteran aircraft for the benefit of collectors and aerophiles. Now we are attempting to enlist the aid of A.A.H.S. Members in various sections of the country to help in the compiling of preserved aircraft in this country.

Will any Member willing to help compile details and photographs of American old-timers and warplanes please contact me so that I may have forms sent?

George W. Frayne, 117 So. Bay Ave., Brightwaters, N.Y.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Member Leonard Opdyke, of 108 Fairhaven Road, Rochester, N.Y., has also been at work on this project and has compiled a listing of currently active restoration, replica and preservation projects.

CURTISS "HAWKS" IN THE ARMY - ADDENDUM

The source for the serial numbers of the Curtiss AT-4 to P-1D conversions listed in Part 1 of the subject article was the Serial Number Index USAF 1918-1946. Further confirmation of the conversions can be found on the Master Aircraft Record Forms of the aircraft concerned. These valuable documents not only authenticate the conversions listed but show that four of the AT-4's were converted to P-1B configuration before being converted to P-1D's. The following table supplements the P-1D Table of Part 1.

SERIAL NUMBER	CONVERTED TO	DATE OF CONVERSION OR AUTHORITY
27-88	P-1B	June 1927 at Langley Field
	P-1D	5-24-29 at SAAD *
27-90	P-1B	12-7-27 at Langley Field
	P-1D	per SAAD radio 2-28-29
27-91	P-1D	2-28-29 at SAAD
27-92	P-1B	1-6-27 at Langley Field
		per Langley ltr 1-27-28
	P-1D	per SAAD radio 2-28-29
27-93	P-1D	2-28-29
27-94	P-1D	8-12-29
27-96	P-1B	12-7-27
	P-1D	per SAAD ltr 2-28-29
27-97	P-1D	3-12-29 at SAAD
27-214	P-1D	per ltr to SAAD dtd 3-12-29
27-217	P-1D	7-15-29 at Kelly Field
27-221	P-1D	per SAAD radio 2-28-29
27-222	P-1D	8-6-29 at Kelly Field
27-223	P-1D	8-25-29 at Kelly Field
27-224	P-1D	8-12-29 at Kelly Field
27-225	P-1D	8-23-29 at SAAD
27-226	P-1D	8-17-29 at SAAD
27-227	P-1D	8-9-29 at SAAD
27-228	P-1D	8-24-29 at SAAD
27-230	P-1D	8-29-29 at SAAD
27-231	P-1D	7-12-29 at SAAD
27-232	P-1D	8-30-29 at SAAD
27-233	P-1D	per ltr to SAAD 3-12-29
27-234	P-1D	per ltr to SAAD 3-12-29
27-236	P-1D	7-29-29 at SAAD
27-237	P-1D	per SAAD ltr 8-31-29

*SAAD - San Antonio Air Depot

Robert L. Cavanagh, 3890 Villanova Drive, Kettering, Ohio.