



News and Views

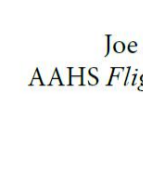
From the Editorial Hangar

Ye editor has a couple of significant road trips in his flight plan for August, which may mean insufficient time to put together another newsletter before early September. What will really happen remains to be seen, of course, but be advised, just in case. Regardless, *FlightLine* in its legacy format—the paper pages of decades past, or the more recent pdf equivalent, and even the “pseudo-blog” pdf format you are now viewing, will be replaced by an exclusively on-line electronic format. As you may recall, that transition was originally announced to take place by 1 January.

For a variety of reasons, mostly having to do with diversion of resources to navigate the ever-changing landscape at Flabob Airport, the “go live” date is still undetermined. But it’s coming. Access will be direct online—you won’t need to view or download a pdf file. The content will be on your screen, then and there. We’ll post the “where” and “how-to” info when we’re actually on the air.

On that same wavelength, AAHS is beefing up our Social Media presence. Love it or hate it, SM is a fact of life now days, and we intend to use it to spread the AAHS word, particularly among the younger folks with an interest in aviation. Click on <https://www.instagram.com/americanaviationhistory> to see a page of pix, mostly of individual aircraft but with a few related subjects in the mix. Clicking on an images will pop out a short description and some relevant details. Some of these pix fairly cry out for further digging. (See our comment on the “fire in the belly” P-61.) If you can add a detail or two, feel free. But the limit is 2,200 characters, including punctuation marks and so forth, so keep it short. Much of what appears on Instagram is duplicated on Facebook—take your pick. Meanwhile, *FlightLine* will continue to occupy the space between abbreviated Instagram and Facebook posts and full-up Journal articles, of which we never have enough.

Going forward, most news from and about AAHS will appear on the Social Media platforms which, if all goes well, will be updated daily. But every so often we’ll run something in *FlightLine* as well, like the photo below. As always, if you have something to share or if you have a question or comment related to aviation history, give us a cyber shout. →



Questions ?
Comments ?
Squawks ?

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Joe Martin
AAHS FlightLine Editor



AAHS HQ crew visits Planes of Fame with tour guide Adam Estes. L to R: Angela Gearhart, Adam, volunteer Heather Wilson, Vanessa Adams, Office MGR Charlie Shaw, Prez Tyson Smith, and Accounting MGR Klara Smith.



A Special B-15 Mission

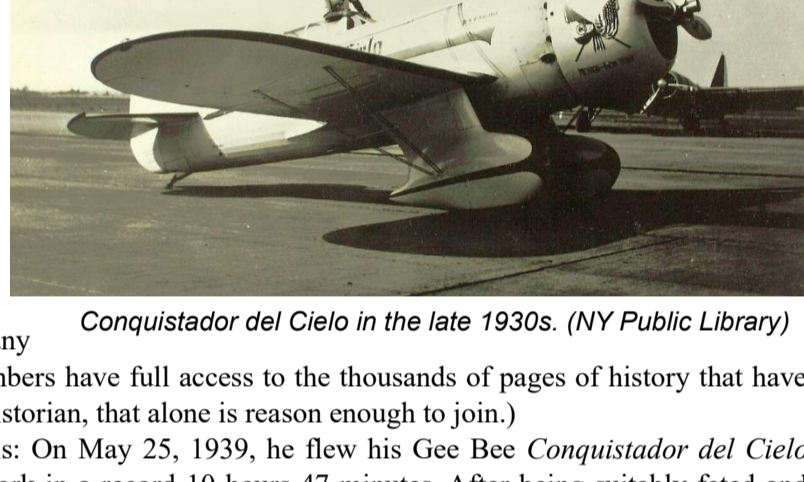
Connecting Some Historical Dots

One of the more interesting aspects in the study of aviation history is discovering connections between individuals—or aircraft—and events over time. As we ponder the next addition to our series of history’s most influential aircraft, we come across all sorts of such tidbits. In this issue, we follow up on one that relates to a couple of articles in the Winter 2024 *AAHS Journal* that recalled the little-known 1923 flight to Puerto Rico by Air Service pilots. The first article was written by Dr. C. Vance Haynes, Jr., whose father, then-lieutenant Caleb V. Haynes, was one of those airmen. Lt. Haynes went on to a storied career as a military aviator, retiring as a Major General. Your editor followed up with a companion piece detailing the flight day-to-day.

A principal source for our article was the *Air Service Newsletter*, the unofficial in-house newspaper of the Air Service, and later the Army Air Corps. The other night, with no particular objective in mind, we opened our *Air Corp Newsletter* file for 1939. Leading off the July 1 edition was an article mentioning Caleb V. Haynes, by then a major. Haynes was back in Latin America, this time as pilot of the Boeing B-15 carrying the body of Francisco Sarabia, the well known Mexican aviator who had died in a crash days earlier. This piqued our interest for two reasons. The B-15, while not exactly one of those mystery ships that little can be found about, it hasn’t drawn a lot of attention, either. Latin American aviation history not being a topic we’ve spent much time on, the name Francisco Sarabia rang no bells. But seeing Haynes listed as pilot on this rather special mission of course meant finding out what this was all about.

The Internet quickly filled in the Sarabia blanks, and the doyen of commercial aviation history, R.E.G. Davies, provides much biographical and contextual material in his *Airlines of Latin America Since 1919*. Of course the *AAHS Journal* archives can be relied upon to provide at least a few words on just about any aviation topic you’d care to investigate. (AAHS members have full access to the thousands of pages of history that have appeared in the Journal since 1956—for the serious historian, that alone is reason enough to join.)

The gist of the Sarabia segment of the story is this: On May 25, 1939, he flew his Gee Bee *Conquistador del Cielo* (Conqueror of the sky) from Mexico City to New York in a record 10 hours 47 minutes. After being suitably feted and



Conquistador del Cielo in the late 1930s. (NY Public Library)



Conquistador del Cielo as a museum attraction.

Haynes and the B-15

Given the circumstances, Sarabia’s death gave the U.S. something of a diplomatic black eye, along with less than desirable publicity. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, with his uncanny sense of human nature and political timing, was quick to order a suitable response. The world’s mightiest aircraft, the Boeing XB-15, would fly the body back to Mexico, accompanied by an entourage of Mexican and American officials. Maj. Caleb V. Haynes would be the pilot.

Major Haynes was no stranger to Latin American skies, going back to the 1923 Puerto Rico expedition. He had spent most of his Air Corps career at Langley Field, Va., home of the 2nd Bombardment Group, the Air Corps’ pioneering strategic bombing outfit. In 1938, Haynes commanded one of six B-17s making a South American “goodwill flight.” Three months later, with Lt. Curtis E. Lemay as lead navigator, he led a trio of Flying Fortresses in the well publicized intercept of the liner *Rex* some 600 miles at sea. In January 1939, he piloted the XB-15 on a “mercy flight” to Santiago, Chile, delivering much needed medical supplies to victims of a massive earthquake. Haynes was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his leadership on the mission.

The non-stop flight returning Sarabia’s remains was also an aerial feat of considerable note, for which Haynes and crew received the 1939 MacKay Trophy for “the most meritorious flight of the year by an Air Corps [today Air Force] person, persons, or organization.” As usual, the *Air Corps Newsletter* published a first-hand report of any notable flight, this one by co-pilot William D. Old, in the August 15, 1939, number. During World War II, Old served in some of the same areas as his old aircraft commander, and also retired as a Major General. As an example of a primary source of aviation history that can be found online, his 1939 article is attached.

The XB-15 (35-277), the sole example produced, went on to set various records, several made with Haynes and Old at the controls. Converted to a transport and redesignated XC-105 when World War II began, the old ship hauled cargo throughout the Caribbean. Underpowered and difficult to fly and maintain, it was retired in 1944. Stripped of useable hardware, the hulk was scrapped at Albrook Field, Canal Zone, in 1945. →



Nice underneath shot of the XB-15, date and locale unknown. (USAF)

THE MEXICAN FLIGHT

By Captain W. D. Old, Air Corps
B-15 Co-Pilot, Mexican Flight

Francisco Sarabia was certainly a National Hero of Mexico and, as "TIME" expressed it, he was the nation's "Lindbergh, Turner and Trippe." He organized and, with his three brothers, operated the Compañia Transportes Aereos de Chipas, the most important native-owned airline in Mexico.

Sarabia purchased from a second-hand dealer on the West Coast a fast airplane, the Q.E.D. This airplane was a Gee-Bee, originally built in 1934 for Jacqueline Cochran to fly in the London-Melbourne Race. Miss Cochran got as far as Bucharest before she was forced out. Subsequently, this plane was entered in four important U.S. races, and each time it failed to finish.

About June 1, 1939, Sarabia took off in the Q.E.D. from Mexico City for New York City to break the non-stop record of 14 hours and 19 minutes set by the late Amelia Earhart. Ten hours and 48 minutes later he set the Gee-Bee down at Floyd Bennett Field.

Eventually he arrived at Washington, D.C., and, after a brief visit, on the morning of June 7th, taking off from Bolling Field on a non-stop flight to Mexico, his engine quit at about 100 feet and he crashed into the Potomac River. President Roosevelt ordered the body flown back to Mexico City.

Upon arrival at Headquarters of the 2nd Bombardment Group, Langley Field, Va., of instructions for the flight, Colonel Robert Olds, the Group Commander, ordered the B-15 to make the flight. Major C.V. Haynes, pilot; Captain W.D. Old, co-pilot; Lieut. G.E. Williams, Navigator; Lieut. J.B. Montgomery, Engineer; Technical Sergeant Adolph Cattarius, Crew Chief; Staff Sergeants W.J. Heldt, D.L. Spicer, Harry L. Hines, Assistant Crew Chiefs; Sergeant G.R. Charlton and Corporal J.E. Sands, Radio Operators, made up the crew.

On June 9th, at 11:45 a.m., we took off from Langley Field and, after a short flight, landed at New Bolling Field. We had expected a box containing the coffin of a gross weight of around 400 pounds. However, upon our arrival there, we found that it would weigh 700 pounds. This necessitated reinforcing the platform in the right outer bomb bay, just in case we encountered some extremely turbulent air.

After servicing to give us a total of 3500 gallons of gasoline aboard, we moved the plane to a predetermined spot to facilitate loading and taxiing out for the take-off.

At Bolling Field, Major Haynes was advised that three passengers would go

aboard for the trip - Commander Manuel Zermeno, Mexican Naval Attache to Washington; Senor Santiago Sarabia, brother of the deceased, and Lieut. Jesse Auton, Aide to the Hon. Louis Johnson, Assistant Secretary of War.

Promptly at 11:00 p.m., the body arrived, accompanied by General Arnold and prominent Mexicans in Washington. Under the glare of flood lights, photographers' flares and photo flashlights, the solemn and impressive task of loading began.

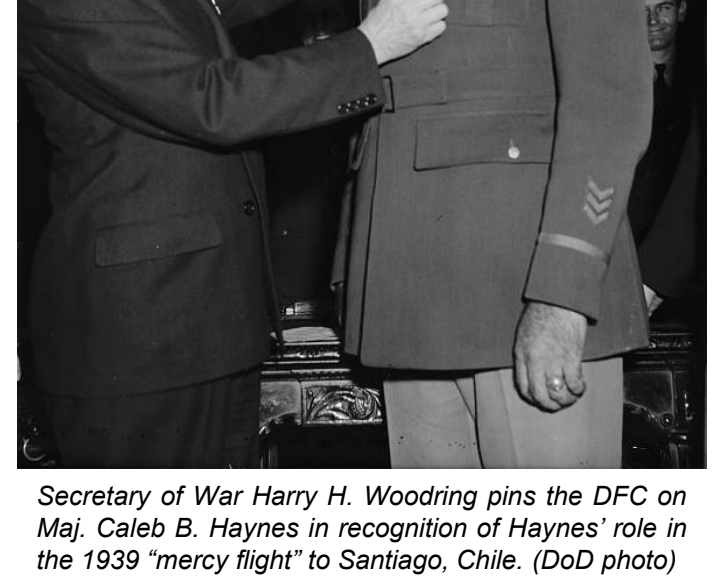
At midnight all was set, and Major Haynes taxied out for the take-off to the south on the new runway. Our gross weight was about 65,000 pounds. It was amazing how high and how near the three radio towers that are just south of the field appeared.

Lieut. Williams set a course for Mexico City, 1798 miles away. This hit the coast near Pensacola, Fla. Except for an area of local storms between Gordonsville, Va., and Charlotte, N.C., the weather was good until just before daylight, when we began to see lightning from a storm of considerable extent along the coast and directly on our course. As soon as it was light enough to see, Major Haynes started easing to the west, looking for a chance to break through, and shortly found one that took us over Mobile, Ala. A new course was set for Mexico City. From the mouth of the Mississippi across the Gulf to the Mexican coast, we had unlimited ceilings with an occasional area of lower scattered clouds. We saw eight freighters and tankers and from their courses we estimated them to be going or coming from Galveston and Beaumont, Texas.

Just a little before noon, and about the time we sighted the Mexican Coast, a radio was received to the effect that the plane bearing Mrs. Sarabia and her son would not arrive before 1435 E.S.T. Since we could not land prior to her arrival, around and around we went to kill two hours. At 1400 E.S.T., we again headed for Mexico City, and as that place was reporting unlimited ceilings and the clouds were on the mountain peaks, we went "over the top." At 1450 E.S.T., we were on the ground.

Many questions have been asked about our arrival - "Were you hit by rocks?" "Did they try to mob you?" It is almost impossible to understand how such reports could have been originated.

There was a tremendous crowd out to meet the plane, estimated by the newspapers to have been 300,000. As soon as we started to taxi back, they broke through the cordon of soldiers and



Secretary of War Harry H. Woodring pins the DFC on Maj. Caleb B. Haynes in recognition of his role in the 1939 "mercy flight" to Santiago, Chile. (DoD photo)

