

40 Years Ago Today They Received Huge Welcome

First Round-The-World Fliers Landed In El Paso

The following account of the first round-the-world flight was written by Cmdr. Millard G. McKinney, USN (ret.), who is working on a narrative report for Ft. Bliss and Biggs Air Force Base concerning early military aviation in this area.

On Sept. 20, 1924—40 years ago today—many thousands of persons from the local area went to Ft. Bliss to greet six Army Air Service fliers who were on the last leg of the first round-the-world flight.

The flight started in Seattle, Wash., more than five months earlier.

Lt. Lowell H. Smith was in command of the three Douglas Air Cruiser bi-planes which were named Chicago, New Orleans and Boston II. They were to stop overnight at the Ft. Bliss Flying Field, then located near the former School of Mines dormitory on the east side of the post.

Others in the group included Lt. Leslie P. Arnold, a mechanic who was accompanying Lt. Smith in Chicago; Lt. Erik H. Nelson, pilot of New Orleans; Lt. John Harding Jr., Nelson's mechanic; Lt. Leigh Wade, pilot of Boston II; and Lt. Henry H. Ogden, Wade's mechanic.

The planes had been expected about 3 p.m., but they had encountered extreme head winds after leaving the Forth Worth area and were forced to land and refuel at Sweetwater.

As a result, they did not arrive

world fliers over Sierra Blanca and escorted them to Ft. Bliss. While the three Air Cruisers slowly banked into their landing pattern, the tremendous crowd roared a welcome and began to surge against the ropes which had been placed around part of the field.

As the planes taxied up to the receiving stand where Maj. Gen. Robert L. Howze and other dignitaries were waiting to extend greetings, many of the spectators broke through the line of soldiers stationed around the welcoming area.

In their eagerness to get as close as possible to the fliers, the crowd became so boisterous that two additional troops of cavalry were assigned to control the situation. The crowd gave the mounted troops no trouble, but some of the foot soldiers were hard pressed.

After a brief welcoming ceremony, the fliers were taken to

Hotel Del Norte for a short rest before the banquet in their honor.

Arthur M. Lockhart, president of the Rio Grande Oil Refinery, was master of ceremonies at the banquet, and Richard M. Dudley, mayor of El Paso, made one of the welcoming speeches.

Afterwards, the fliers were taken to the International Fair and Expansion at the old fairgrounds near Cotton Ave. and Dallas Street.

The unexpected appearance of the fliers delighted the large crowd. They were given an enthusiastic ovation when the mayor presented each flier with a Mexican serape as a memento.

The fliers left El Paso for Tucson, Ariz., Sept. 21. Following that stop, they made a few more stops on the West Coast before arriving at Seattle Sept. 28, five months and 22 days after their official departure April 6, 1924. They had circled the globe

in 15 days, 11 hours and seven minutes elapsed flying time and touched or traversed 21 foreign countries, 25 states and one U.S. territory.

Four of the specially-built Douglas Air Cruisers had started the expedition and two of them were lost. One, the Seattle, struck a mountain in Alaska April 30, and the other, the Boston I, broke up after a forced landing at sea near Nova Scotia and was abandoned Aug. 4.

No serious injuries to personnel occurred in either crash.

The Boston II replaced the Boston I and Lts. Wade and Ogden continued their flight, but Maj. Frederick L. Martin, pilot of the Seattle, and his mechanic, Sgt. Alva L. Harvey, were missing for 10 days after their escape from death and no replacement plane was available at that time.

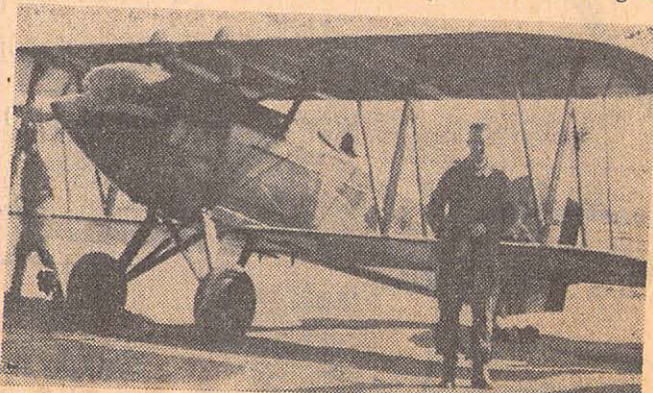
The fliers were deserving of the many honors which were bestowed on them during the flight and after their return to the U.S.

Their pioneer flight was made under conditions which would be considered appalling by most of today's aviators. Even more than their expert flying skill and mechanical ability, their spirit was a prime factor which enabled them to complete the flight and, thereby, add to the U.S. air prestige.

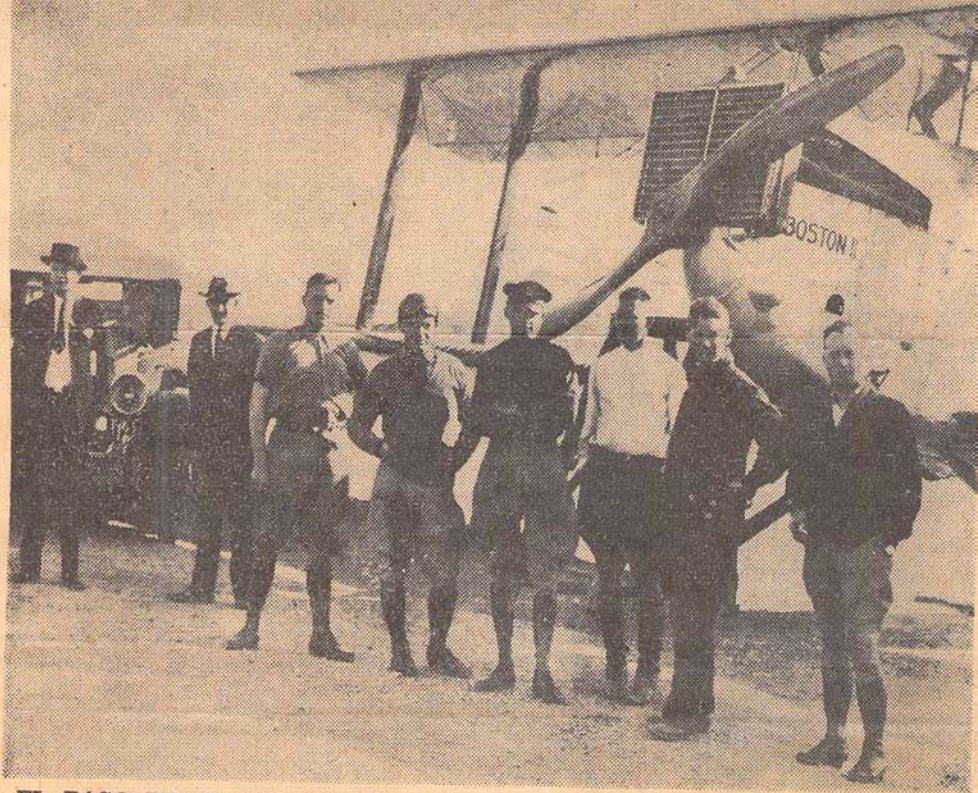
As evidence of continued interest in that historical venture the Explorers Club of America will honor eight aviators on this anniversary.

The club is sponsoring a "Night of Exploration" dinner in the Veverly Hilton Hotel, Beverly Hills, Calif., Wednesday and Lowell Thomas, the flight historian, will be the master of ceremonies.

The five surviving fliers, Harding, Ogden, Harvey, Nelson and Wade, will be present. Widows of Arnold, Martin and Smith also have been invited.



READY TO LEAVE—Lt. Erik H. Nelson, engineering



EL PASO DEPARTURE — This picture was taken in El Paso on Sept. 21, 1924, the morning of the day the round-the-world fliers left for Tucson, Ariz. Left to right are: Ed Dugan, owner of the Packard agency in El Paso and an aviation enthusiast who often provided free taxi service for visiting fliers; Lloyd Cunningham, owner of the Raybestos Brake Co., and another aviation booster who often drove one of the Dugan taxis; Lt. Henry H. Ogden, mechanic in the Boston II; Lt. Leslie P. Arnold, mechanic in the Chicago; Lt. Lowell H. Smith, pilot of the Chicago and commander of the flight; Lt. Reuber C. Moffat, liaison officer for the fliers during their trip from Boston to Seattle; Lt. John Harding Jr., mechanic in the New Orleans; and Lt. Leigh Wade, pilot of the Boston II. Lt. Erik H. Nelson is not shown in this picture.

—(Photo Courtesy of Lloyd Cunningham)

City Editor, El Paso TIMES
(Attn Mr. Dorrance Guy)

The following article regarding the "Round-The-World Fliers" is submitted per your request, for possible use in the 20 September issue of the TIMES.

"El Paso Honored Round-The-World Fliers 40 Years Ago Today"

On 20 Sept 1924, many thousands of persons from the local area went out to Fort Bliss to greet the six Army Air Service fliers who were on the last portion of the first round-the-world flight, which had officially started from Seattle, Washington over five months earlier.

Lt Lowell H. Smith was in command of the three Douglas Air Cruisers (the "Chicago", the "New Orleans" and the "Boston II") which stopped overnight at the Fort Bliss Flying Field (then located around the former School of Mines dormitory on the east side of the Post). Lt Leslie P. Arnold was the mechanic flying with Lt Smith in the flag plane "Chicago". Lt Erik H. Nelson was pilot of the "New Orleans", with Lt John Harding, Jr., as mechanic and Lt Leigh Wade piloted the "Boston II", with Lt Henry H. Ogden as mechanic.

The planes had been expected about 3:00 PM but they encountered extreme head-winds soon after leaving the Ft. Worth area, and were forced to land and re-fuel at Sweetwater. As a result, they did not arrive over the local field until after 6:00 PM, and by that time the welcoming crowd had grown to an estimated 15 to 20 thousand anxious people.

Seven local planes from the 12th Aero Squadron met the fliers over Sierra Blanca and escorted them to Fort Bliss. When the three Air Cruisers slowly banked into their landing pattern, the tremendous crowd on the ground roared a welcome and began to surge against the ropes which had been placed around part of the field. As the planes taxied up to where MGen Robert L. Howze and other dignitaries were waiting to extend greetings, many of the spectators broke through the line of soldiers stationed around the welcoming area. In their eagerness to get as close as possible to the intrepid fliers, the crowd became so boisterous that two additional troops of cavalry were assigned to control the situation. The crowd gave the mounted troops no trouble whatsoever (!) but some of the soldiers on foot were hard pressed to maintain order while the fliers were alighting from their planes.

After a brief welcoming ceremony at the Post, the fliers were taken to Hotel Del Norte for a short rest before the banquet given in their honor that night. Mr. Arthur N. Lockhart, President of Rio Grande Oil Co., was master of ceremonies at the banquet and Mayor R.M. Dudley gave one of the welcoming speeches. Afterward, the fliers were taken to the International Fair and Exposition, then in progress at the old fair grounds near Cotton Avenue and Dallas Street. The unexpected appearance of the fliers delighted the large crowd, and they were given an enthusiastic ovation when the Mayor presented each one with a Mexican serape, as a memento of their stay in El Paso.

The accompanying photos were taken on the morning of 21 September, shortly before the planes took off for Tucson. In the large photo, from left to right, are (1) Mr. Ed Dugan, then owner of the Packard Agency and an aviation enthusiast who often provided free "taxi service" for visiting fliers in those days (2) Mr. Lloyd Cunningham, then owner of Raybestos Brake Co., another aviation booster who sometimes drove one of the "Dugan taxis" (and who donated these photos), (3) Lt Henry H. Ogden, mechanic in the "Boston II"

(4) Lt Leslie P. Arnold, mechanic in the "Chicago" (5) Lt Lowell H. Smith, pilot of the "Chicago" and Commander of the World Flight (6) Lt Reuben C. Moffat, the liaison officer for the fliers during their trip from Boston to Seattle (7) Lt John Harding, Jr., mechanic in the "New Orleans" (8) Lt Leigh Wade, pilot of the "Boston II". NOTE: Lt Erik H. Nelson is not shown in this photo. He was engineering officer of the squadron and it is probable that he was making a final pre-flight check of one of the planes when the photographer snapped this picture. (The small photo shows Lt Nelson standing by one of the Air Cruisers.)

The intermediate photo shows the Curtiss PW-8 and Lt Moffat, liaison officer for the World Flight, just before taking off for Tucson on 21 September. This particular pursuit plane was one of the newest and fastest in the Army at that time. It was designed for 180 mph top speed and, on 4 September, Lt Moffat established a cross-country speed record of 166 mph for the 365 mile flight between Boston and New York City.

After leaving Tucson the fliers made a few more stops on the West Coast before arriving at Seattle on 28 September - 5 months and 22 days after their official departure on 6 April 1924. They had "girdled the globe" in 15 days, 11 hours and 7 minutes elapsed flying time, and while enroute they had touched or traversed 21 foreign countries, 25 states and one U.S. Territory.

Four of the specially built Douglas Air Cruisers had started the momentous expedition and two of them were lost enroute. One (the "Seattle") struck a mountain in Alaska on 30 April, and the other (the "Boston I") broke up after a forced landing at sea near Nova Scotia and was abandoned on 4 Aug. The "Boston II" replaced the "Boston I" and Lts Wade and Ogden continued their flight, but Major Frederick L. Martin, pilot of the "Seattle", ~~pilot of the "Seattle"~~ and his mechanic, SSgt Alva L. Harvey, were missing for ten days after their miraculous escape from death at Port Moller and the Air Service decided to not replace that plane.

Those first round-the-world fliers well deserved the many honors bestowed on them while they were enroute, and after their return to the U.S.A. Their pioneer flight was made under conditions which would be considered appalling by most of today's aviators. Even more than their expert flying skill and mechanical ability, their indomitable spirit was a prime factor which enabled them to complete the flight and thereby add immeasurably to our nation's air prestige.

As evidence of continued interest in that historical venture, the Explorers Club of America will honor the eight aviators on this 40th anniversary of their round-the-world flight. The Explorers Club is sponsoring a "Night of Exploration" Dinner at the Beverly Hilton Hotel, Beverly Hills, Calif., on 23 September and Lowell Thomas (historian on the 1924 flight) will be the master of ceremonies. The five surviving fliers, Mr. John Harding, Jr., Mr. Henry Ogden, BGen Alva Harvey USAF (Ret), BGen Erik Nelson USAF (Ret) and MGen Leigh Wade USAF (Ret) will be present and it is hoped that Mesdames Leslie Arnold, Fred Martin and Lowell Smith, widows of the other three, can also attend."

This article was prepared from one of the chapters in a forthcoming historical report on early military aviation at Fort Bliss, Texas, entitled "Forgotten Flying Field". The report is in narrative form and is being written

by CDR M.G. McKinney USN (Ret), for the Public Information Officers at Fort Bliss and Biggs Air Force Base. The Commander lived on the Post during and after World War I and his report is based, in part, on recollections of boyhood hours spent at the original Army Air Service flying field in this area, which was located in those days near the old School of Mines dormitory, east of Fort Bliss.

Dorrance, please give me a copy of your story as soon as possible. If it ends up as a credit to the fliers (and all names are spelled right !) then I propose to send it to General Doolittle. He may wish to pass it on to the fliers to afford them a chance to reminisce a bit about their stopover in El Paso (-?-)

Sincerely,

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