

# AVIATION News

Florida & National

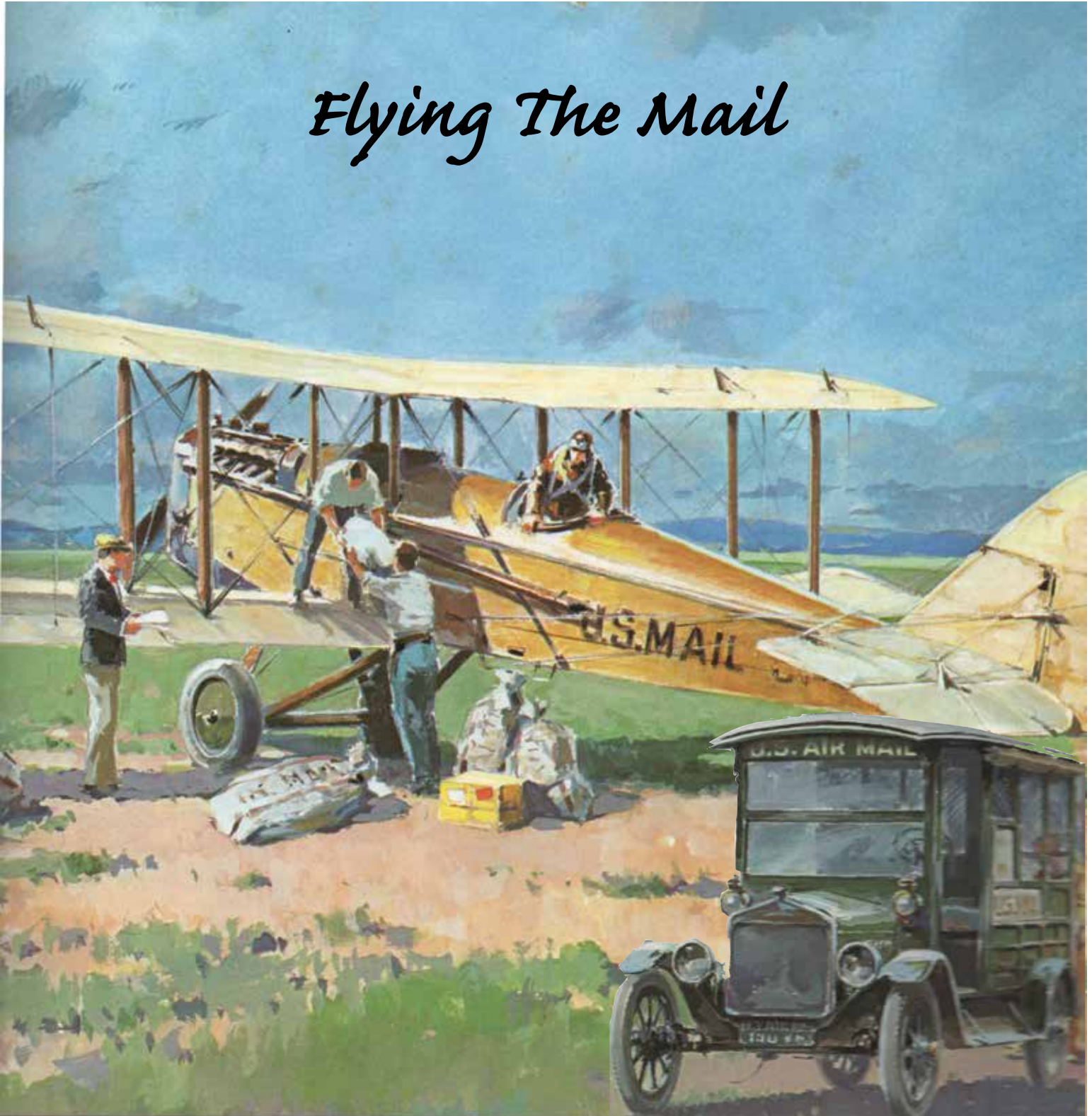
## *Happy Landings*

March - 2024

● YESTERDAY ● TODAY ● TOMORROW

PUBLICATION OF FLORIDA AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## *Flying The Mail*



## President's Message

**P**ony Express with wings was what the early fliers were called that flew mail across the country.



Mary Fletcher

On July 26, 1775, the U.S. Postal System was established by the Second Continental Congress, with Benjamin Franklin as its first postmaster general. Franklin put in place the foundation for many aspects of today's mail system.



**T**he Standard JR-18, with a mail pouch painted on its side, was piloted by Max Miller on the first civilian mail flight from Washington to Philadelphia in 1918. This plane displayed the superior aerodynamic qualities that led the Post Office to buy six for use as mail carriers.

Flying the mail is a great story of daring pilots flying in all kinds of weather in spite of accidents that claimed the life of one pilot in six in 1920 alone.

This story starts on Page 4. Hope you enjoy it.

The Florida Aviation Hall of Fame is scheduled for Friday, April 12 at the Florida Air Museum during Sun 'n Fun. Two great candidates, Owen Gassaway, Jr. and 1st Lt. James Polkinghorne, Jr. will be inducted. Hope to see many of you if you are at Sun 'n Fun April 12.

There were a couple corrections from the January issue: It is called The Medal of Honor and not the Congressional Medal of Honor. And, James Polkinghorne was a 1st Lt. not a 2nd Lt.



March Edition - 2024

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FAHS meets the fourth Saturday of each month, unless otherwise noted, at the AWAPS building, Albert Whitted Airport, Gate 5, 10:30 AM. All are invited to attend.

# Discussion starts for Dr. Brown Scholarship



FAHS members David McLay, Tom Nocera, Terri Griner, Barbara Strachan and Warren's daughter Annemarie Penderjoined them via conference call. (Mary Fletcher was also present and took the photo)

**T**he Florida Aviation History Society started discussion on a scholarship as a tribute to the legacy of "Doc" Brown, a founding member and longtime editor of its "Happy Landings" newsletter.

The scholarship will be in the amount of \$5,000, and will be for the express purpose of helping cover the expense of advancing a current pilot's training in the aviation industry. FAHS hopes to have scholarship details by July 17, which marks the late Dr. Brown's 100th birthday.

Anyone interested in giving to this scholarship can mail a check to Florida Aviation Historical

Society,  
 451 8th Ave.  
 SE, St. Petersburg,  
 FL 33701  
 and mark the line  
 Doc Brown  
 Scholarship.

FAHS is a 501-C3 organization and all donations are 100% tax deductible.



The late Warren Brown

**The Florida Aviation Hall of Fame will take place on Friday, April 12, with the ceremony starting at 10 am until 11:30, in the Florida Air Museum during Sun 'n Fun.**

# Flying The Mail

It was, for Second Assistant Postmaster General Otto Praeger, a "Pony Express with wings." America's first regularly scheduled airmail service between New York, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. and for the nation, it was a giant step into the Air Age, launched on May 15, 1918 amid all the pomp, patriotic hoopla and expectation.

The New York to Washington line operated briskly, though Praeger reported revenues of \$60,653 and a net deficit of \$8,969 for the first six months. And he was undaunted by the onset of winter. "The mail has been carried in blinding rain and hail, on fogbound days with visibility of not over half a mile, and in the face of gales," he boasted.

Pilots were frequently faced by foul-weather flights but learned to take them almost in stride.

Eager to prove the airmail's possibilities to an increasingly indifferent public and a dubious Congress, the postal barons had leaped before they looked. Pilots had been sent to fly hastily tested planes over a difficult and inadequately explored route with which they had little familiarity. Most important, the de Havillands were simply not fit for the demands of airmail duty, especially long-distance and low-altitude flying.

With the development of successful night flying methods, the new postal administration's first few years had been crowned



At the Polo Grounds in Washington, George Boyle awaits the takeoff for Philadelphia on the Air Mail Service's opening day.

with a technical achievement. The Air Mail Service's finest accomplishment during this period was a dramatic improvement in its safety record. In 1920, the fatalities per million miles flown had stood at 7.62. In 1921 the figure dropped to 3.66.

Between July of 1921 and September of 1922 not a single pilot or other airmail employee died on duty, a record that won the service the National Aeronautic Association's coveted Collier Trophy for "the greatest achievement in aviation" in 1922.

The reason for the improvement was in part technological. A network of radio stations at the mail fields now permitted the continuous relay of weather data so that pilots had a better idea what to expect ahead. Parachutes, though still disdained as sissified by many pilots, were available by 1922. The quality of mainte-

nance and repair work had also been improved.

The de Havillands that had failed in their airmail debut were back with modifications. The axles and undercarriages had been strengthened to accommodate larger wheels, and the cockpit was relocated to the rear. The performance of the improved DH 4s and the arrival of milder weather, the Post Office celebrated the airmail's first anniversary, May 15, 1919, by reinstating the east-west service that had been abandoned five months before.



Hary Mingle, president of Standard Aircraft Corporation, presents Otto Praeger with delivery papers for six new mail biplanes at the company's New Jersey plant on August 6, 1918.

With the frequent difficult weather and the absence of any reliable navigational instruments, the biggest surprise of the United States Air Mail's beginnings was not that it sometimes failed but that it succeeded as often as it did, all without fatalities or seri-

*continued on Page 5*



## The Faithful D.H. 4

When the de Havilland D.H. 4 joined the Air Mail Service in 1918, it was already famous as the best single engined bomber of World War I. Designed in 1916 by the British aviation pioneer Sir Geoffrey de Havilland, the plane served with Britain's Royal Air Force in France, Belgium, Russia and the Near East.

Almost 5,000 were built on license in the United States—the only American made plane to see combat in the War.

When it was completely overhauled for the Post Office, the D.H. 4 proved to be a remarkably adaptable mailplane. In 1923 some D.H. 4s were fitted with landing light, underbelly flare boxes and lengthened exhaust pipes that shielded the pilot's vision from the engine's glowing exhaust.

The plane was powered by a 400 hp Liberty engine that gave it a top speed of 124 mph and a range of 250 miles. With improved modifications, the D.H. 4s became the first aircraft to regularly fly the mail at night.

ous injuries.

The Post Office, displaying an affection for airmail statistics that it would retain through nine adventurous years, reported after two weeks of operations that 53 out of 60 flights had reached their destinations without unscheduled interruptions.

The Post Office Department was fortunate to have a crop of optimistic pilots. For the two years beginning in mid-1919 were a time when Otto Praeger and his deputies seemed to reel from crisis to crisis. Their troubles were both internal and external. Eager to demonstrate airmail's feasibility, postal officials added new routes and fields, experimented with new planes and hired new pilots. Sometimes it was the pilots that failed and sometimes the planes; other times the weather. Often the plans simply exceeded the available resources, and skeptical congressmen, viewing the Air Mail Service's "fire and fall back performance" with the

eyes of nervous loan officers, threatened repeatedly to cut off its funds.

They had ample reason for their concern. At the end of 1919, there were still only two regular routes, the New York-Washington stop. The Philadelphia stop had been abandoned as unnecessary after the acquisition of longer-range de Havillands and New York-Chicago via Bellefonte and Cleveland.

The single engined de Havillands acquired from the Army and rebuilt to postal specifications were still the workhorses of the service, supplemented by a few Curtiss R-4s and the twin engined Martin bombers. With this mixed fleet of aircraft, the nation's aerial mailmen made their appointed rounds.

The beginning of transcontinental flights brought new excitement to the cities and towns along the way and boosted the morale of the pilots.



James Murray, whose 1,300 mile flight from Chicago to Salt Lake City in 1920, helped establish the first transcontinental airmail route. He was a former school-teacher who learned to fly in World War I. He went on to become vice president of the Boeing Airplane Company.

For almost eight years, the D.H. 4 served as the workhorse of the Air Mail Service. And the pilots who flew it, many of whom went on to become airline captains, never lost their warm affection for the old plane.

*continued on Page 6*

In the decade that followed World War I, airmail pilots practiced seat-of-the pants flying with many a forced landing and many a long trek to the nearest farmhouse. Sometimes the fliers' hairbreadth escapes were bizarre, and occasionally they were amusing enough to joke about.

Membership in the 'suicide club' demanded supreme courage and endurance, but to pilots who survived its trials, flying the mail was a career like no other. "Alone in an open cockpit, there is nothing and everything to see," said one of them. "It was so alive and rich a life that any other conceivable choice seemed dull, prosaic and humdrum."



**E. Hamilton Lee** was a flying instructor for the U.S. Army during World War I. Lee pioneered the airmail routes between Chicago and St. Louis and Minneapolis and Chicago. By the time he retired in 1949, he had logged more than 4,000,000 miles.



**James Edgerton** flew from Philadelphia to Washington on May 15, 1918, the first day of regular airmail service. He later became the Post Office's chief of flying operations.



**Max Miller** left home to become a sailor at the age of 14 but soon abandoned that calling for aviation. The first civilian pilot to be hired by the United States Air Mail Service, Miller proved invaluable as a scout for new routes.



**Randolph Page**, on September 8, 1920, flew the New York to Chicago leg of the first transcontinental mail flight. A colorful character, he was said to have consumed two quarts of whiskey once, while flying between Omaha and Chicago.



**William Hopson** once entertained the citizens of Bellefonte, Pennsylvania, a stopover on the mail run, by bicycling down the steps of their courthouse. He died in 1928 when his plane crashed in bad weather en route to Cleveland.



**James Knight** became a national hero in February, 1921, when he flew through the night from North Platte to Chicago to save the first continuous coast-to-coast mail flight from failure. He had broken his nose the week before in a crash landing.



**Harold Lewis** flew the Omaha-to-Cheyenne leg of the airmail's first regularly scheduled night flight on July 1, 1924. "He was the ace of the whole bunch," remarked a field clerk. "He always got through, it seemed, when others could not."

World War II - 1944



Four U.S. Army Air Forces P-51 Mustang fighter airplanes in formation over the Italian countryside during World War II.  
Crew of The 8 Ball flew in the first U. S. raid on Germany in early 1943.

The long-range P-51 Mustang fighter was invaluable to the Allied victory, enabling resumption of strategic bombing after heavy losses suffered by unescorted bombers in 1943. Developed for export to Britain, models modified by the British to use Rolls-Royce Merlin engines became America's most capable wartime fighters.

The Mustang first flew in October 1940, entered production in May 1941, and began combat operations with the RAF in April 1942. Some 1,579 Allison-powered Mustangs were produced. They were typically equipped with two .50-calibre nose-mounted and four .30-calibre wing-mounted machine guns, although one model had four 20-mm cannons and another (the A-36A) was a dive-bomber for the USAAF. They served as low-altitude fighters and as long-range photo-re-

connaisance aircraft under the designation F-6, mostly with the RAF.

The P-51 is widely regarded as the finest all-around piston-engined fighter of World War II to be produced in significant numbers.

The P-51's superiority was particularly evident above 20,000 feet.

Beginning in December, 1943, P-51 Mustang fighters began to escort American bombers to the farthest targets in Germany, tilting the odds toward the Allies in the air war.



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**World War II - continued from Page 7**


**Pilots of the 332nd are shown near a P-51. The Black American unit excelled in combat and helped open the way for eventual desegregation of the armed forces.**

**T**he Tuskegee Airmen initially were equipped with Curtiss P-40F and L model Warhawks (99th Squadron only), briefly with Bell P-39 Airacobras (March 1944), later with Republic P-47 Thunderbolts (June–July 1944), and finally with the aircraft with which they became most commonly identified, the North American P-51 Mustang

**T**he unit received a Distinguished Unit Citation for a mission on 24 March 1945 when the group escorted B-17s during a raid on the Daimler-Benz tank factory at Berlin, fought the Messerschmitt Me 262 jet interceptors that attacked the formation, and strafed transportation facilities while flying back to the base in Italy. During the action, its pilots were credited with destroying three Me 262s of the Luftwaffe's all-jet Jagdgeschwader 7 in aerial combat that day, despite the American unit initially claiming 11 Me 262s on that particular mission. Upon exam-

ination of German records, JG 7 records, just four Me 262s were lost and all of the pilots survived. In return, the 463rd Bomb Group, one of the many B-17 groups the 332nd were escorting, lost two bombers, and the 332nd lost three P-51s during the mission. Fifteenth Air Force dispatched about 660 bombers; 250 of these headed for Berlin. Altogether, the Fifteenth Air Force lost nine B-17s and one B-24. Out of the fighter escort, five P-51 Mustangs were destroyed during this sortie. Three

of the four Me 262 jets that were lost by the Luftwaffe were reportedly shot down. All their pilots bailed out wounded.

Flying escort for heavy bombers, the 332nd earned an impressive combat record. Reportedly, the Luftwaffe awarded these airmen the nickname, "Schwarze Vogelmenschen," or "Black Birdmen." The Allies called these airmen "Redtails" or "Redtail Angels," because of the distinctive crimson paint applied on the vertical stabilizers of the unit's aircraft.



With the end of hostilities in Europe in May 1945, the 332nd was reassigned to the 305th.



# American Aircraft Stamps



The planes shown above are important for their engineering and for the changes they introduced to one of America's favorite hobbies, traveling.



The Curtiss JN-4 "Jenny" originally a trainer for World War I pilots, became an official air mail plane. The Jenny was also popular with barnstormers, and it became a familiar sight whenever the public gathered to watch aerobatics.



The Ford Tri-Motor was one of the great successes of the late 1920s aviation boom. Nicknamed the "Tin Goose," the Tri-Motor was an all-metal response to Fokker's similar wood-winged plane.

## Space Exploration Stamps

U. S. Postage Stamps have paid tribute to the pioneering spirit of American space exploration for many years. They provide a colorful record of U.S. space accomplishments and offer a window into the future.

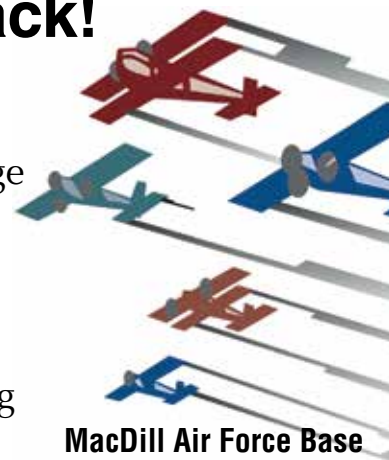




# Tampa Bay AirFest March 29-30

## Tampa Bay AirFest is back!

**T**he men and women who work and serve on MacDill Air Force Base invite you to Tampa Bay AirFest 2024 (March 29-30, 2024). It is our honor and privilege to host this free event which will feature an amazing variety of military and civilian flight performances (including The United States Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron "Thunderbirds"). Tampa Bay AirFest 2024 promises to be a weekend packed with heart-pounding air performances and family-friendly activities showcasing all five branches of the United States military as well as our first responder agencies. This two-day event is your chance to get up close and personal with military/civilian aircraft and pilots!



**MacDill Air Force Base is privileged to have called the Tampa Bay region home for over 80 years**

# T *a look back into the archives of history* N

## THE WOMEN OF AVIATION

**Lillian Todd** the first woman in the world to design and build an airplane, was not a pilot or engineer but an inventive stenographer.

In 1906, she unveiled her first aircraft, a peculiar machine meant to be powered by its own movement through the air. Unfortunately, it owed more to wishful thinking than to the laws of physics, for it never flew.

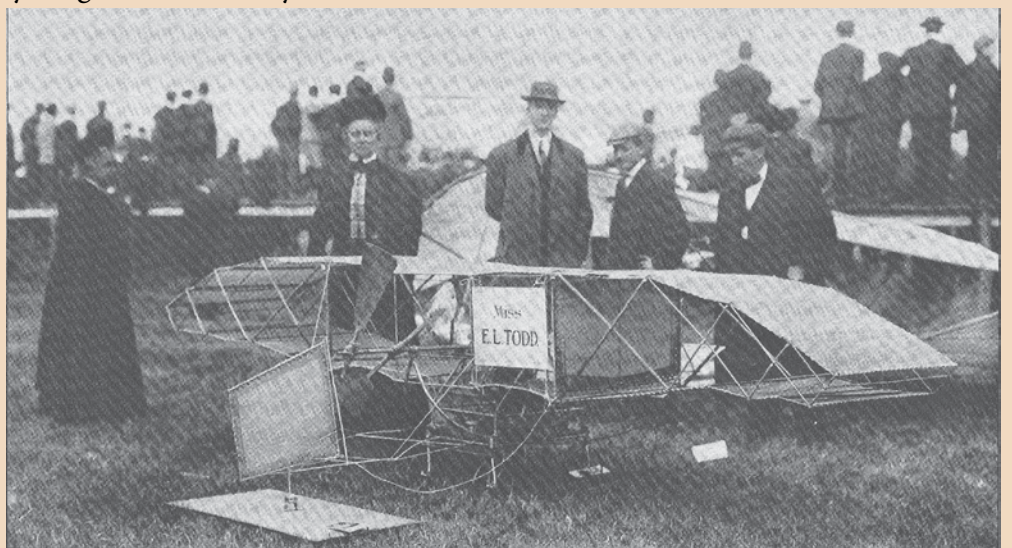
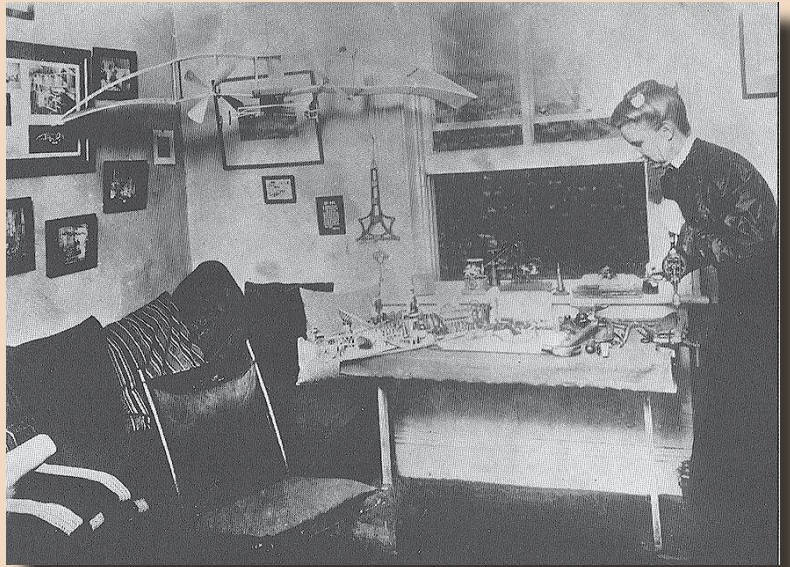
Emma Lillian Todd was born in Washington, D.C., in 1865 and started inventing at an early age that included a paper holder for typewriters, a sundial and an Aeolian harp. She went on to study law, but her passion for inventions remained and was soon joined by a growing love of aviation.

Inspired by the first motorized flights of Wilbur and Orville Wright, she presented her first aircraft design at a Madison Square Garden aero exhibition in New York City in 1908. Todd's work attracted the attention of philanthropist Olivia Sage, who pledged Todd financial support to continue her work. In autumn 1908, she began constructing her aircraft with the Wittemann Brothers Company on Staten Island. The two-seater biplane was modeled on an albatross; its wings were curved to direct the air downward to provide lift. The aircraft's frame was made of spruce wood, covered with fabric and strengthened with piano wire. The airplane had two seats and was 36 ft. in length, powered by a modified Rinek motor.

Building an aircraft wasn't enough for Lillian; she also wanted to fly it herself and applied for permission at the Richmond Borough Commissioner of Public Works. Her permit was denied. Nevertheless, on November 7, 1910, the aircraft made a powered hop of 20 feet over the Garden City aviation field with pilot Didier Masson at the controls, but proved unable to sustain flight.

Realizing the importance of aviation, Lillian started the first Junior Aero Club in 1908 to foster the education of future aviators. She taught countless youngsters to build flyable models.

Lillian died September 26, 1937 in Pasadena, California and disappeared into history.



At the 1908 Aeronautical Society exhibition, Miss Todd displayed a model of one of her air-powered planes.

**Florida Aviation Historical Society  
AWAPS, Albert Whitted Airport  
451 8th Ave. SE  
Saint Petersburg, FL 33701**



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**Meet Tim Savage...** He has had an interest in warbirds and aviation history since he was a teenager and has owned a number of planes over the years. Currently he has a DC-3, Tiger Moth, L-19 Birddog, Grumman TBM (restored in the 1990s), WACO YTP-14, WACO YMF-5, P-40 and two T-6D Texans at his Leeward Air Ranch, Florida home.

Back in Indiana he has a V35B Bonanza, J-3, Yak-52TW, SNJ-5 and a PT-26. Tim was also the publisher of Warbird Digest, a magazine that he founded in 2004.

*Join Us!*

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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AWAPS Building - Albert Whitted Airport  
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