100 YEARS

ERNEST A. LOVE FIELD

Prescott, Arizona

Part 1 – Prelude

Prescott's Earliest Aeronauts, Aviators and Landing Fields 1891-1926

By David M. DuPree

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INTRODUCTION

For most Americans in the early 20th century – those not fortunate enough to live near one of the very earliest flying fields – the first glimpse of an "aeroplane" in flight usually came at a local fair, exhibition or other large public gathering. This was particularly true in the years before WWI. The pilots were essentially circus performers, trying to outdo each other with new and ever more dangerous aerial feats. There were individual aviators who traveled these circuits and there were teams sponsored by the larger aviation concerns of the day (i.e., Wright, Curtiss, Moisant). The flying machines were still frail by any standard. In most cases, they traveled from venue to venue by railroad: unload - assemble - fly - disassemble - then load into a boxcar and move on to the next contracted appearance. Occasionally, an "air meet" would be promoted in a larger city, attracting aviators from a wide area. The sole business model for these early aviators was to attract paying *spectators,* hence the "death-defying" aspect of the performances.

If you didn't catch one of the "birdmen" performing at a local fair before the Great War, there would be new opportunities to encounter your first airplane *and maybe even ride in it*. For hundreds of small towns across America, the first airplane to land in the vicinity was flown by an itinerant barnstormer or a military aviator on a cross-country flight. Sometimes the landings were planned, sometimes not. For early flyers, precautionary and emergency landings were just part of the job. Being able to find a place to land on short notice was an essential skill.

The barnstormer was typically, but not always, an ex-Army or Navy pilot, who earned his wings during WWI. In the years following the Armistice, military appropriations dropped to levels that were parsimonious even by peacetime standards. Suddenly, the nation had a surplus of trained aviators, many of whom wanted to find a way to continue flying. Fortunately for them, there were also large numbers of war surplus training airplanes – Curtiss JN-4 "Jennies," Standard J-1's, Thomas-Morse Scouts, etc., along with massive inventories of motors, propellers and other components – all available at a fraction of their original cost to anyone with some money saved and a burning desire to fly.

For a few more years, local fairs and other large public gatherings continued to provide a way for an aviator to earn a living. The airplanes were now capable of flying from venue to venue and performers could organize into troupes. Some of these air circuses were large enough to draw their own crowds, and they operated in much the same way as their earthbound counterparts – well-planned itineraries, advance advertising, posters, handbills, publicity stunts, glamorized performers and all of the necessary equipment and trappings.

Aircraft design had taken a leap during the war and the Curtiss and Standard biplanes looked more modern (a truly relative term) than the prewar box kites. The pilots were now mostly enclosed in a cockpit, no longer seated precariously in the open air. To spectators, the cockpit looked more substantial, though in reality it was just a lightweight framework covered by linen fabric. All they could see was the pilot's head, which wasn't quite as thrilling as seeing an entire body moving through the sky attached tenuously to a strange, sputtering assemblage of wires, struts and braces. To satisfy the public's appetite for dangling humans, "wing walkers" and parachutists were added to the acts. The routines became increasingly elaborate. This was especially true for the Los Angeles-area stunt pilots who performed in silent pictures: a game of tennis on the top wing of a Jenny, a shotgun wedding, an old west shootout. Not to mention all manner of death-defying transfers –

plane to plane, plane to car, plane to train – as well as staged "emergencies." The apparent silliness of these aerial skits did little to mask the very real danger.

The biggest difference between the prewar and postwar performances was that the surplus training planes could accommodate one or two passengers in the front cockpit. And they could now fly longer – perhaps 5 or 6 hours – before something needed to be adjusted, repaired or disassembled. This created a whole new business opportunity. A vagabond aviator could now sell rides. For the pilots traveling alone or in pairs, this was how they made a living. Accordingly, they were always in search of paying passengers. That meant finding new places that hadn't already been visited two or three times by other gypsy flyers. The pilots who wanted to continue eating had to push farther into the hinterlands, which included the high-altitude towns of the Mountain West. This presented an additional layer of hazard to an aviator flying a linen-covered biplane with only a 90-hp OX-5 or 150-hp Hisso engine. Sometimes a landing place was prearranged, but just as often the aviator flew over the area for a while to rouse the locals, then selected the field that looked most promising and made a low pass or two before setting down. If the ship was right side up when it came to a stop and the landowner wasn't pointing a shotgun at it, then it was time to start hopping passengers.

AERONAUTS and AVIATORS

The term "Aeronaut" was created to describe someone who ascends into the sky in a lighter-than-air aircraft, which in the late 19th century meant balloons and rudimentary dirigibles. There were some balloonists who were trying to advance the science of aeronautics, but there were many others who were simply trying to make a living, of sorts, by performing.

Ballooning was not new, but in the United States, as the new century approached, it became a popular source of entertainment at fairs and other public events. Before long, however, simply rising and descending in the big balloons was not enough to satisfy the crowds. At that point parachute leaps were added to the routines of the most audacious aeronauts, greatly increasing the attendant dangers. These performances required a special kind of person – a true daredevil, a fatalist, capable of ignoring the likelihood and consequences of an error or misstep. Male or female, the performers tended to be extroverted showmen who enjoyed the attention and publicity. Some became famous. It was an enterprise with few barriers to entry. If you had the nerve and could buy or make a balloon and parachute, you were in business. Sometimes the newcomers apprenticed with experienced aeronauts. Others learned by doing, which increased the chances of an abbreviated career.

The aeronauts often created elaborate acts, costumes and personal histories, embellishing them as needed. For the itinerant balloonists, there were typically periods of feast and famine. The money for a contracted performance could be quite good, though it was not uncommon to be completely broke in a few weeks, or even days. Some of the more nomadic aeronauts might occasionally leave town without paying their bills.

The most famous and established aeronauts sought contracted appearances and were represented by booking agencies. The less-known traveling aeronauts would go from town to town, sometimes passing the hat (euphemistically called "private subscription") until enough money was collected to justify an exhibition.

Performers 1891–1918

Aeronauts and aviators, floaters and flyers, who are known to have assembled their aerial apparatus on site and levitated for the entertainment of spectators at Prescott.

1891 AUG	"PROFESSOR HOWARD"	AERONAUT balloon and parachute	Courthouse Plaza
1895 JUL	"PROFESSOR NELSON" (W. H. "Red" Nelson) and "PROFESSOR BURKE" (Otto Burke)	AERONAUTS balloon and parachute	Courthouse Plaza
1901 JUL	HAZEL KEYES	AERONAUT balloon and parachute	Courthouse Plaza
1913 OCT	"AVIATOR NIXON"	AVIATOR Curtiss Pusher 8 cyl., 60 hp	Northern Arizona Fair, Fairgrounds (Dougherty Tract)
1914 OCT	"AVIATOR HILL"	AVIATOR Moisant-Bleriot 100-hp monoplane	Northern Arizona Fair; Fairgrounds
1915 OCT	LUCIELLE BELMONT	AERONAUT balloon and parachute	Northern Arizona Fair; Fairgrounds
1916 OCT	EDWARD STINSON	AVIATOR probably a modified Partridge-Keller biplane; 80-hp Gnome rotary	Northern Arizona Fair; Fairgrounds

SEE ALSO: Endnotes 1 and 2

COURTHOUSE PLAZA

1891

(Aug. 4)

PROFESSOR HOWARD, Aeronaut

The first recorded visit to Prescott by an aeronaut came in August 1891.[1] Charles Howard, known as "Professor Howard," was from California's San Jaquin Valley. Newspapers in that region reported that he "lived from boyhood in Bakersfield," then worked as a jeweler and watchmaker in Merced and Fresno. He began performing as an aeronaut in 1890.

Howard came to Prescott from Kingman, where it was reported that he made an "excellent ascension." After Prescott, he planned to go to Flagstaff and then into Mexico.

> "Prof. Howard, a young aeronaut, arrived in town on yesterday's train and will probably make a balloon ascension and a parachute descent on Sunday afternoon."
>
> *Weekly Journal-Miner,* August 5, 1891: 3
> [report from July 31]

> "Professor Howard will make a balloon ascension tomorrow from the plaza. If we mistake not it will be the first one ever made in Prescott. The balloon will be inflated with hot air and he will make the descent with a parachute."
>
> *Weekly Journal-Miner,* August 5, 1891: 3
> [report from August 3]

> "Prof. Howard's balloon ascension last evening was not a perfect success. He was delayed about an hour in getting started, and when he finally got his balloon inflated and swung from the earth, by a trapeze attached to his parachute, he only rose about 200 feet when he commenced to descend without releasing his parachute. The balloon was inflated on Montezuma street on the west side of the plaza, and when released moved gracefully towards the southeast, passing over M. Goldwater & Bro.'s store, and descended to the ground just south of the city hall, when the professor released his parachute. After being relieved of his weight the balloon again shot into the air for a short distance and turned over, allowing the heated air to escape, when it again came down in a collapsed condition. One hundred dollars was raised by private subscription to pay for this ascent, but owing to his failure to make the leap as advertised he did not claim the money, and will try the experiment again this evening."
>
> *Weekly Journal-Miner,* August 5, 1891: 1

A Leap From Mid Air

> "I will make a leap from my parachute if I have to stay in Prescott for a week," remarked Prof. Howard to a JOURNAL-MINER representative Monday evening while he was preparing to make his second balloon ascension. "I never leave a town until I accomplish what I have promised," he added. In less than an hour afterwards the professor had made good his word. As previously announced he made the second ascent last evening, his air ship being cut loose from its terra firma moorings after it had been inflated shortly after 7 o'clock. It shot rapidly heavenward, the professor swinging from his trapeze attached to it. It rose to a height of about 1,000 feet and moved gracefully but slowly eastward

before a slight breeze. The sight was a beautiful one and was greatly admired by thousands of spectators. When the professor had reached a point over the public school grounds he took his bearings and estimating that he could light in the vacant lots just beyond, he pulled the cord which operated the scissors attachment to the rope connecting the parachute to the balloon, when he commenced to drop very rapidly. When a descent of from 150 to 200 feet had been made his parachute opened out gracefully and his descent was checked and became slower. He miscalculated the distance somewhat, however, in regard to the place of lighting as the momentum he had received carried him past the vacant lot he had selected and he and his parachute descended on the roof of the JOURNAL-MINER man's modest residence in east Prescott, the aeronaut, the parachute and the house all being uninjured. He slid down the corner of the house as gracefully as though it was an every day occurrence with him and as if a balloon ascension was not a success unless he could alight on an editor's housetop, and returned to town where he received the congratulations of his friends. The performance was a perfect success and the coolness with which he made the daring leap was remarkable. Professor Howard left this morning for Flagstaff with a view of making an ascent there, and thence goes to the City of Mexico where he has an engagement for next month. We can cheerfully recommend him wherever he goes as being square in his profession or at least of having acted perfectly so in Prescott."

Weekly Journal-Miner, August 5, 1891: 1

Sadly, just a month after he left Prescott, Professor Howard was killed when his balloon burst while performing in Guaymas, Mexico. One report claimed that he purchased the balloon second-hand after its previous owner had been killed. According to this account, the balloon was examined and the fabric was found to be "burnt and rotten, and it seemed impossible that the aeronaut would trust his life to a few yards of cloth which could not resist the strength of a child" (*Fresno Daily Republican,* September 27, 1891: 6).

1895

(July 11, 14)

PROFESSOR NELSON and PROFESSOR BURKE, Aeronauts

About four years after Professor Howard made the first balloon ascension and parachute leap on Prescott's Courthouse Plaza, two more itinerant aeronauts arrived with similar plans. W. H. "Red" Nelson ("Professor Nelson") and Otto Burke ("Professor Burke") arrived around July 9. The two young men were from San Francisco.

The "subscription" model was again employed to raise money for balloon ascensions that would culminate in parachute landings. At least one successful ascension was made from Courthouse Plaza on July 11, and another was planned for the 14th, although no follow-up report has been found.

"Prof. W. H. Nelson made a very beautiful balloon ascension from the west side of the Plaza yesterday evening, a little after 8 o'clock. The balloon rose to a height of 600 or 800 feet, and then drifted eastward, directly over Patton's opera house. When it reached a point over the school house, the aeronaut cut the rope which held him to the balloon, and commenced his descent. He dropped rapidly for a short distance, when his parachute opened out, arresting his rapid

descent. He continued drifting eastward and landed on the roof of Hugo Richards' back porch, with his parachute resting on the roof of the house. He came down without any injury."

Weekly Journal-Miner, July 17, 1895: 3
[report from July 12]

"The grand balloon ascension and parachute jump is now an assured fact and will take place on Montezuma street, Sunday evening at 7 o'clock. Enough money has been subscribed to cover the expense of sending the balloon up and by Saturday night enough more will be collected to pay the aeronauts. Everybody is expected to come and witness the wonderful and daring performance of Prof. Nelson in mid air."

Weekly Journal-Miner, July 17, 1895: 3
[report from July 13]

Apparently, only Nelson made ascensions in Prescott. The two men traveled next to the Salt River Valley, where they were hampered by storms and high winds. They made at least one good ascension at Tempe, but had to postpone performances at Phoenix due to poor weather.

While at Phoenix, their pasts began to catch up with them. Newspapers in California issued warnings that the pair had left San Francisco without paying their debts. The *Arizona Republican* picked up the story on July 27 and added that Nelson and Burke had also left Prescott without settling up. Apparently the *Republican* was unaware that the men were still in Phoenix and planning another exhibition.

Five days later, the aeronauts met tragedy. First, Burke injured his legs during a hard landing. Next, Nelson hit the roof of a house at high speed before falling to the ground. He succumbed to his injuries. On August 4, 1895, the *Arizona Republican* reported:

"Burke is not frightened by his partner's fate. He said last night he would continue in the balloon business, but not in this locality. And he added: 'I expect that the same thing that happened to 'Red' will some time happen to me.' "

Three days later, the *Republican* reported that young Burke, presumably after some reflection, had decided to go home to San Francisco "and enter some occupation that is safer and more profitable than the balloon business."

1901

(July 4-6)

HAZEL KEYES, Aeronaut

Though it is subject to debate, Miss Hazel Keyes may have been the most flamboyant aviation personality to ever levitate in Prescott. The only other contender that comes to mind is Roscoe Turner, who landed at Ernest A. Love Field in April 1933. (Turner's own brand of flamboyance was dulled appreciably by the fact that he had just been forced to abort an attempt to set a transcontinental speed record.)

"The committee was exceedingly fortunate in securing the world renowned lady aeronaut, Miss Hazel Keyes, for a three days' engagement. She will make a grand balloon ascension from the plaza each day. She will take up to the

clouds with her the wonderful monkey, Jennie Yan Yan, and they will each leap from the balloon in a separate parachute and make the terrifying descent from the clouds in them."

"Prescott's Fourth." *Weekly Journal-Miner,* June 19, 1901: 1

RENOWNED AERONAUT
Miss Hazel Keyes Will Entertain
the Prescott People With Startling Exhibitions

"The Fourth of July committee is to be commended for its good work in general, and particularly for securing Miss Hazel Keyes, the world renowned aeronaut, to give one of her startling aerial performances each evening of the celebration.

"The lady arrived in town recently and is building a balloon especially for her Prescott ascensions. It will be eighty feet in diameter, twenty feet larger than the one she used in making her ascensions in Phoenix and Safford, in fact the balloon will be larger than any ever wafted into midair by an Arizona breeze.

"The famous toyer with death says she will ascend to a height of one mile and remain there thirty minutes before making the descent in her parachute. On one evening she will take Bob Brow's pet coon up with her and drop him with a little parachute. The coon will be fastened in a basket during the trip.

"Miss Hazel Keyes has electrified thousands of people with her daring feats and will electrify the Prescott people during her performances here. She is highly spoken of as a lady and is certainly one of the prettiest midair performers ever seen hanging to a balloon."

Weekly Journal-Miner, June 28, 1901: 1

"A Monster Air Ship; The Big Balloon Being Manufactured for Miss Hazel Keyes' Ascensions During the Celebration; The Privilege of Naming It or of Using It for Advertising Purposes Offered to the Highest Bidder"

Weekly Journal-Miner, June 29, 1901: 1

Aeronauts performed for decades before and after the turn of the 20th century. Thousands of large and small newspapers described to greater or lesser extents, the balloon ascensions and parachute jumps. However, very few described the exhibitions in as much detail as did the *Weekly Journal-Miner* in its accounts of the performances by Hazel Keyes in 1901. The three separate daily reports are sprinkled randomly through the weekly newspaper's edition of July 10, 1901.

They are long. However, they are presented here in their entirety because they provide an uncommonly vivid narrative of these performances. Keyes was an experienced, top-tier aeronaut, though that still left a lot to chance. The scenes described here were repeated countless times by aeronauts at fairs and public gatherings across the country:

First ascension on Thursday, July 4 (p. 2)

"The most exciting event of the day, though, was the balloon ascension by Miss Hazel Keyes in the evening. It was down on the program to take its departure at 7 o'clock, but it was 7:40 before it was cut loose from its moorings. The furnace through which it was supplied with hot air to give it buoyancy was constructed on the southeast corner of the plaza, and like the balloon itself was built under the personal direction of Miss Keyes, a portion of the work being done

by her own hands. The monster air ship swayed to and fro as it was being filled with hot air, tugging at the ropes as though anxious to get away. It was held down by about twenty men until inflated to about two-thirds or three-fourths of its capacity when Miss Keyes strapped herself to the trapeze, and to the crowd and those who were holding the balloon she remarked: 'Good bye all; let her go," when all hands let go and the balloon shot upward with a sudden bound, rising to a height of 3,000 or 4,000 feet, when the daring aeronaut looked no larger than a bird suspended in mid air. Just as the balloon left the earth one of the ropes broke and it was feared it might result in an accident, but it soon righted and continued its ascent, being carried by the wind in an easterly direction. After passing the Citizen's cemetery, Miss Keyes, while yet at a height of from 2,000 to 4,000 feet, cut herself loose from the balloon and her parachute opened gracefully and the descent was commenced. At first it came down very slowly, but in the meantime Miss Keyes had selected a place of safety to light, and to accelerate her descent swayed the parachute from side to side, when it descended more rapidly. She came down about a mile and a half east of Prescott, lighting in a clump of bushes and was dragged a short distance by the parachute, scratching her face slightly, but otherwise was uninjured.

"The balloon, after being released from its human freight, swayed back and forth for a short time, finally careening entirely, when the hot air and smoke was discharged from it and rolling itself up into a big ball of muslin it struck the earth about a mile east of town, or about a half mile from the lighting place of its owner.

"Miss Keyes had scarcely touched the ground until three men, who had followed her on horseback, were by her side ready to render her any assistance, but fortunately none was needed further than to assist her in freeing herself from the parachute. Her first inquiry of them was as to the condition of her balloon, fearing that it might have been injured in the descent."

Second ascension on Friday, July 5 (p. 3)

"Last night's balloon ascension proved equally successful with the one of the previous evening, with the exception that Miss Keyes sustained a serious sprain to her ankles in alighting. The balloon went up very gracefully, but probably not to quite as great a height as on the first occasion. It drifted to the east in very much the same course as during the first ascension and Miss Keyes released her parachute from it much sooner than the previous evening, at a point directly over Pleasant street in East Prescott. When she cut the rope that held her parachute to the balloon she dropped rapidly for about 150 feet, when the parachute opened out very gracefully, and with the momentum it had received as well as being propelled by the wind it was carried to a point just across the gulch east of the Citizen's cemetery before she reached terra firma. From the time the balloon was released until she alighted the time did not exceed seven minutes. The balloon came down very near the same place it did on the previous evening and only a short distance from where the aeronaut alighted. There was a regular stream of carriages and horse back riders to follow her and when the first ones reached her she was found to be suffering from severely sprained ankles and was placed in R. E. Morrison's carriage and returned to town, where Dr. McNally treated her injured members. Despite her mishap Miss Keyes announces that she will complete her engagement with the Fourth of July committee by making another ascent this evening. She is certainly a very daring and nervy little woman, and so far as the people are concerned who have contributed the funds for the celebration: in view of her accident the committee would not be censured for canceling the engagement for this evening and paying for her the full sum agreed upon for the three evenings. Every one who has seen those made by her are agreed on the fact that her ascensions have not only been the most daring but the most successful ever seen. That she thoroughly understands her business

she has certainly demonstrated, and she has also demonstrated that a flight through the air and a daring leap of 3,000 feet has no more terror for her than a promenade on the streets."

Third ascension on Saturday, July 6 (p. 1)

"Despite the injuries received on Friday evening in alighting and contrary to the advice of friends, Miss Hazel Keyes insisted on fulfilling her engagement with the Fourth of July committee on Saturday evening by making her third ascent into aerial space. While during the former ascents there was but little wind blowing there seemed to be less on Saturday evening. Miss Keyes inflated her balloon somewhat more than on other occasions, and a prettier or more successful trip could not be imagined than she made on Saturday evening. In the absence of wind the balloon went more directly upwards until a height of about 4000 feet was attained, its motions being eastward as on former occasions, but its flight less rapid. When near the eastern limits of the town and when at an altitude of about 4000 feet, she cut her parachute loose and the descent commenced slowly and gracefully, her course being northward of the course taken on Thursday and Friday evenings.

"After being released of the weight of its human freight, the balloon turned a summersault, hovering in mid air, head downward, until the hot air escaped, then it commenced a series of tumblings similar to a tumbler pigeon, all the while keeping close to the aeronaut, and finally rolled itself up into a ball and fell to earth a few hundred yards this side of where Miss Keyes came down, both of them reaching the earth about the same time. The balloon fell in the flat east of Cemetery gulch, near the Whipple road, while the parachute and its precious freight lit in the open flat just southwest of the Whipple reservoir, where there were neither rocks nor brush, and Miss Keyes escaped without any inconvenience or pain even to her sprained ankles.

"On her return to town a sort of open air reception was held by her in front of Hotel Burke, and Col. J. F. Wilson delivered a short address thanking her for her services in connection with the celebration and the very interesting part she took in it.

"Miss Keyes has announced her intention of taking up her permanent residence in Prescott, and will offer her services at any time they may be desired in her special line, and certainly as a successful aeronaut she stands at the head of the list."

After describing Hazel Keyes' ascensions, the *Prescott Evening Courier,* whose editors were not completely enamored with this form of entertainment, had this to say:

"The Courier is glad that Miss Keyes is determined to quit this dangerous business. While it affords an interesting sight, the horror of what might happen is never absent from the spectators' mind. This brave little woman deserves a better fate than to be gathered up in a gunny sack."

"The Fourth In Prescott." *Prescott Evening Courier,* July 12, 1901: 3

Although vows to quit were sometimes part of the act, it appears that her Prescott performances were, in fact, her last. She and her husband remained in Yavapai County for more than a year before splitting and moving on. The most charitable word to describe her life would be colorful. It was also tumultuous, sensational, grim and grisly. She was, above all, incredibly resilient.

NORTHERN ARIZONA FAIR

Yavapai County Fairgrounds

1913

(October 27-29)

"AVIATOR NIXON"

FIRST AIRPLANE TO FLY AT PRESCOTT

Fittingly, the First Northern Arizona Fair, held October 27-29, 1913, brought the first airplane to fly at Prescott. The fair association contracted with Los Angeles aviator, Lewis Francis, to bring his 8-cylinder, 60-hp Curtiss Pusher to Prescott for an exhibition. The agreed-upon fee was $1,000. That would be equivalent to about $33,000 in 2026 (*U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*).

> "Experienced birdmen will fly over Prescott three times a day during the Northern Arizona Fair to be held at the Mile High City, October 27-28-29. Passengers will be taken up each flight and three first-class ascensions are guaranteed every day, The Association has received such genuine and substantial assurances of support for the Fair that they have contracted for an expenditure of $1,000 for this, the first real aviation program ever offered in Northern Arizona."
>
> *Holbrook News,* October 3, 1913: 4

> "The contract for the appearance of an aviator and his aeroplane from the coast arrived here yesterday. Several provisions were changed, the document signed and returned to Los Angeles. The money to defray the expense of this feature has practically been raised."
>
> "Work Is Rushed At The Fairgrounds."
> *Weekly Journal-Miner*, October 8, 1913: 5
> [report from October 4]

Powered flight – that is, airplanes – had only existed for slightly less than a decade. Every year brought advances and new lessons about aerodynamics. The effects of high altitude, especially when combined with elevated temperatures and gusty winds, were still only vaguely understood in 1913. Even if they didn't fully grasp why, the early aviators were learning that it was an atmospheric combination to be avoided.

Lewis Francis may have signed the contract without fully investigating the conditions he would encounter at Prescott's Fairgrounds. That is best evidenced by the fact that he agreed to take a passenger on each flight. Once he had unloaded his plane at the Prescott railyard and assembled it, he then had to face reality. He not only couldn't carry passengers, but he had doubts as to whether he could carry himself. Fortunately, he was accompanied by another aviator named Nixon, who, it was said, possessed considerably less girth. And that's how "Aviator Nixon" became the first person to pilot an airplane at and above Prescott.

At least that was the official story. Nixon may have been the designated pilot all along, with Francis acting as agent (perhaps unbeknownst to the fair association). After Prescott, Nixon went to Phoenix to perform at the State Fair. There, he was described as "the star

aviator of the Lewis Francis string of airmen." Then later in November, Nixon performed at Deming, N.M. and Bisbee, Ariz. There was no mention of Francis. While in Bisbee, Nixon commented that he had built his Curtiss Pusher. So, with regard to the Northern Arizona Fair, Francis may not have owned the Curtiss or intended to fly it.

Even with Nixon's lighter frame, the flights were still challenging and hazardous. Reportedly, only three of the nine contracted flights were attempted, and the ones that were made lasted only a few minutes. Nevertheless, on those occasions when the brave Mr. Nixon did take off, his flying impressed the crowds. For most of them, it was the first time they had ever seen an airplane in flight.

> "Many of the cars made the trip in anticipation of seeing either the aeroplane flight or an announced baseball game. In either respect they were disappointed as both of these features failed to materialize."
>
> *Weekly Journal-Miner,* October 29, 1913: 4 [report from October 28]

> "Following the Governor's address, President Fredericks formally declared the Northern Arizona fair opened. Just as he finished a cry went up: 'Here it comes. Here it comes.'
>
> "Probably seventy-five percent of the people in that grandstand had never before seen an aeroplane in action. Consequently the exclamations of surprise were not only numerous but prolonged.
>
> "Aviator Nixon made his start from a level stretch of land some distance from the fair grounds and circled about the grounds twice before effecting a successful landing close to the baseball diamond. Once he traveled close enough to the grandstand to enable the spectators to hear the chug of his engine.
>
> "Today's flight will unquestionably be of a prolonged period. The aviator reported that the air currents were exceptionally bad yesterday, a fact which deterred him from making more than one flight. The trees within the grounds coupled with the high altitude and hills on all sides were responsible in a great measure.
>
> "However, with favorable weather conditions existing today the aviator proposes to give an exhibition in every sense of the word. The real flight will be made at about 2:30 o'clock this afternoon."
>
> "Daring Stunts Bring Crowd To Its Feet." *Weekly Journal-Miner,* October 29, 1913: 4

> "[...] Aviator Nixon hove into sight with his aeroplane. Finding weather conditions more favorable than upon the previous day the aviator piloted the air bird higher until a height of over 1,000 feet had been reached. After circling about the grounds twice, Nixon volplaned to the starting point. When introduced later to the crowd he was given the glad hand."
>
> "Second Day Program Even Better Than First." *Weekly Journal-Miner,* October 29, 1913: 8

> "Aviator Nixon was next introduced. The aviator piloted his air vessel over the grounds and grandstand twice before effecting a landing within the enclosure. But three official flights have been made by the aviator as against nine contracted for. But every one of these flights was made during the afternoon while the crowds were in attendance." (general recap of the Northern Arizona Fair)
>
> *Weekly Journal-Miner,* November 5, 1913: 7 [report from October 30]

"Lewis Francis, the Los Angeles aviator, was on hand with his Curtis bi-plane. Although he had an 8-cylinder 60-horse power engine, the altitude made it impossible to carry passengers, and the flying was done by L. M. Nixon, a much lighter man than Francis. The frequent flights of the machine were full of interest for those who had never seen an airship, and were a revelation in the masterly handling of this vessel of the air." (general recap of the Fair)

Coconino Sun, November 7, 1913: 1

About Nixon, we know only that he was from Cleveland, Ohio, before moving to Southern California. When not simply referring to him as Aviator Nixon, newspapers took great care to assign him a wide range of first names and initials, including L.M., L.J., L.F., C.E., George and Guy. Likewise, Francis' first name alternated between Lewis and Louis. Both men appear to have remained active in Los Angeles aviation into 1914, then the trail turns cold.

In promoting Nixon's flying exhibition near Bisbee on the last day of November, 1913, the *Bisbee Daily Review* presented an interesting profile of the man. It may be the only description of Aviator Nixon that we're likely to find. Given his place in Prescott's aviation history, it's worth including it here.

"Nixon's personality is interesting. Of the professional, there is absolutely nothing in his appearance. He looks anything else than the begoggled, helmeted, booted aviator of popular conception. Standing by his machine, an onlooking crowd is very likely to take him for a curious farmer, intent upon seeing the insides of the thing. His flying costume generally consists of a common cap a jumper and overalls. The latter on Friday were tied around the bottoms with pieces of rope. In the crowd, he was the most unconcerned of all. But there was care and quiet intensity of application to the business in hand in his every movement.

"The machine which Nixon flys is of the Curtis type. However, Nixon claims that it is superior to the Curtis, by reason of alterations and additions of his own in construction. Nixon built the machine. He has entire confidence in it. He believes he knows its every trick, yet he admits that it may have some that he has not learned. There is no bravado about the man, but a tremendous amount of earnestness. He does not lack daring, else he would never have attempted the flight on Friday, nor the one he is going to make today, but it is the purposeful, result getting sort of daring, free from display and bombast."

"Aviator Nixon Understands His Business."
Bisbee Daily Review, November 30, 1913: 3

Incidentally, Nixon made two flights at Bisbee. Conditions at the Warren Country Club matched those at Prescott: elevation over 5,000 feet, surrounded by hills and very gusty winds. An attempt by Didier Masson to fly there in 1911 had ended in a crash, repairs, then another failure. In his Curtiss Pusher, Nixon completed both of his promised exhibition flights, winning the admiration of the assembled crowd. He was clearly becoming an expert in operating from high-altitude fields.

1914

(October 15-17)

"AVIATOR HILL"

For the 1914 Northern Arizona Fair, organizers contracted with Moisant International Aviators, one of the nation's largest aerial exhibition agencies. Moisant issued press releases stating that Capt. J. Hector Worden would perform at the Fair in one of the company's 100-hp Moisant-Bleriot monoplanes, which was a state-of-the-art flying machine in 1914. For the past few years, Worden had been receiving notoriety for his flying exhibitions and his adventures as an aviator in Mexico. He was said to be Cherokee and a graduate of the Carlisle School. He was also reported to be a pilot in both the U.S. Army Reserve and the Mexican Federal Army.

Very similar to what happened in 1913, the headlining performer was replaced. "Aviator Hill" apparently did all of the flying at the Fair. There is no indication that Worden was even present.

Little is known about Hill. A month earlier, there was a newspaper report that "J. H. Hill" was to fly for Moisant at an exhibition in Blackfoot, Idaho. Despite extensive searching, no other references have yet been located. Whatever the reason for the switch, Hill's performances were well received by fairgoers in Prescott.

> "One of the outstanding attractions at the Second Annual Northern Arizona Fair, to be held October 15-16-17, will be the presence of Capt. J. Hector Warden, one of the galaxy of aerial stars who fly under the banner of The Moisant Co., the largest operators in new and scientific air navigation.
>
> "Warden will fly each day, displaying his sensational and spectacular stunts in a 100 h. p. Moisant Bleriot monoplane. The start and finish will be made from the infield."
>
> *Holbrook News,* October 3, 1914: 6

> "Flights by a Moisant monoplane, starting and ending at the fair grounds, will be one of the daily features." [...] "The hanger for the monoplane which is to make daily flights will be erected early next week."
>
> *Weekly Journal-Miner,* October 14, 1914: 3 [report from October 9]

> "At the close of his address Mr. Fredericks said: "I now declare the second annual Northern Arizona Fair opened," and scarcely had the last word fallen from his lips when Doc Pardee, in stentorian tones, commenced the program by introducing Aviator Hill, who made the first air-flight of the day."
>
> *Weekly Journal-Miner,* October 21, 1914: 5 [report from October 16]

> "Never was there a more beautiful afternoon than the one yesterday for such an excellent sport program as was presented before about two thousand people, and never has there been a crowd of people in a more receptive mood for the appreciation of good things.
>
> "The program opened with a flight by Aviator Hill in his monoplane, which was simply grand. The aviator rose directly in front of the grandstand, and before he was through had glided smoothly over the mountain to the northeast, circled back over the grounds three or four times directly in view of the people, who were fairly thrilled with enthusiasm. The only feat he attempted was the spiral glide, which was not, however, accomplished in its best form. He flew sidewise, backwards, and in many peculiar positions, but did not attempt the inverted

exhibition, for which he is famous, owing to the slight resistance afforded in the atmosphere at this elevation. One of the remarkable features of the Hill flights is the perfect control he has over his machine. It seems that he can guide it with the same precision and certainty that an automobile can be manipulated on a marble floor. He met a warm reception in both his flights yesterday, and gave the people their full money's worth."

Weekly Journal-Miner, October 21, 1914: 5
[report from October 17]

There was no report of Hill's flight on Saturday, the final day of the Fair. His life before and after the Northern Arizona Fair is, at present, a mystery. J. Hector Worden was killed in 1916 when the wings of his monoplane folded while performing a loop at Vickery, Texas.

1915

(October 21-23)

LUCIELLE BELMONT, Aeronaut

Lucielle Belmont is believed to be the last of the old-school daredevil aeronauts to perform at Prescott.[2] Contracted for the 1915 Northern Arizona Fair, she made her ascensions and parachute jumps at the Prescott Fairgrounds, rather than Courthouse Plaza.

Belmont made her first ascension and parachute leap in 1912 as part of the "Famous Belmont Sisters." The Belmont Sisters had been performing balloon ascensions since at least 1899. They were probably neither sisters nor Belmonts. It was likely a stage name. This is supported by the infrequent classified ads that appeared in the Grand Rapids, Mich., newspaper:

"LADY to make balloon ascension immediately; experience not necessary; salary $25 and all necessary expenses. Write or telephone Belmont Sisters' Balloon Co. Reed City, Mich."

OR

"WANTED–Young lady to travel as an aeronaut for Belmont Sisters Balloon Co., Reed City, Mich. Ruth C. please telephone. We work Indianapolis Sunday."

The first ad is from 1912, and could be the one to which Lucielle Belmont responded. The second is from 1918. The "Belmont Sisters" were occasionally billed as trapeze artists and aerialists. The act may also have performed as a singing trio on vaudeville circuits.

At some point, perhaps as various "sisters" left the act, Lucielle became the headliner. The newspapers and publicists used every conceivable spelling of her first name, though evidence suggests that either Lucielle or Lucille is correct.

Thrilling Air Act Is Secured For Fair

"Lucielle Belmont, the champion of all champions and the peoples' favorite aeronautess, will make her first appearance to a Southwestern audience at the opening day of the Northern Arizona Fair, October 21st. This was determined at the weekly meeting of the fair association, held Thursday, as a result of the recommendation to this effect made by Chairman Belcher of the aviation committee. Miss Belmont, who is the only lady in the world making a triple

parachute drop, uses only the largest balloons, which are all new each year and very showy, for exhibition purposes. Her costumes are par excellence, but no tights are worn. In recommending that the fair association engage the services of Miss Belmont, the aviation committee, composed of Chairman Belcher and Messrs. Norwood and Shumate, figured that the people from Northern Arizona demanded something new, something different, and of course, in the aerial line. The public wants a thriller and realizing this, Miss Belmont has originated several new feature parachute acts in connection with balloon flights.

"Miss Belmont will make three different flights during the fair. On the first day, October 21, the flight will be made with a torpedo sack parachute drop. In this act, the parachute is rolled up and place in a canvass sack. At a great height, Miss Belmont severs the connection, and while falling through the air, it is necessary for the parachute to unroll before it can open. While ascending, the parachute is not in sight. October 22 will witness Lucielle Belmont in her spectacular balloon flight and torpedo sack double parachute drop. In this act two separate torpedo sacks are used and two parachutes. Both parachutes are rolled the same, and both are hidden from sight. At a given signal the aeronaut makes the parachute drop the same as in the single torpedo sack act. When the parachute opens and is slowly descending, the second drop is made from this parachute, making a double torpedo sack parachute drop from one balloon. It is difficult to imagine the altitude the balloon must attain with any degree of safety to make this act safe. Miss Belmont guarantees that there are no tree-top ascensions with these acts.

"On the last day of the fair, October 23, will be presented the thriller act supreme, with the torpedo sack and a triple parachute drop, from one balloon. For novelty, originality and skill of execution this act is without a peer. In this act two torpedo sacks are used and three parachutes, only one parachute being in sight. In this act three separate and distinct parachute drops are made. Two parachutes are rolled the same as for the torpedo sack double drop and one parachute in view. No hoops or other devices are used to make the parachutes open quickly, and each parachute often drops from 500 to 1,000 feet before opening. All the parachutes are colored red, white and blue, and when open in the air, have the appearance of gigantic, but beautifully colored circular American flags – an attraction in themselves."

Weekly Journal-Miner, October 6, 1915: 4
[report from October 2]

Under the headline, "Interesting Story Of Progress Is Told By Numerous Exhibits," the following three daily reports appeared in the October 27, 1915 edition of the *Weekly Journal-Miner,* page 4:

Report from Friday, October 22

"Every one of the five horse races was exciting and with the balloon ascension, which was made on one of the kind of days that are boasted of by Prescott more excitement and sensation were added. [...] "Lucielle Belmont with the wind in the right direction and at the right velocity, made a very pretty ascension in a large balloon, and after reaching a height of about 1,000 feet dropped first in one parachute which fell 100 feet before it opened and then in another which dropped another 100 feet before it opened. Madame Belmont is expected to make her descent from the sky this afternoon in three different parachutes."

Report from Saturday, October 23

"After ascending to a heighth of over 1,500 feet Lucielle Belmont dropped in three different parachutes and undoubtedly furnished the most sensational event on the program. Madame Belmont before making her ascension manages the

entire work of arranging the balloon and parachutes and then rides astride a small frame work into the sky to defy death in three different parachute leaps before she reaches the ground."

Report from Sunday, October 24

"Broncho busting, children's sports including races of all sorts and the ascension of Lucielle Belmont in the balloon, composed the remainder of the program. Madame Belmont only dropped from her balloon in one parachute yesterday."

Belmont married C. C. Baldwin and thereafter was sometimes billed as Lucielle Belmont Baldwin. Three, sometimes even four, parachute breakaways became her specialty. In November 1922, while being treated at a hospital in Atlanta, Belmont told a reporter from the *Atlanta Georgian* that she had spent a total of more than three years in seven hospitals as a result of mishaps during exhibitions.

" 'Aside from landing in treetops, cemeteries, city streets, buildings, and the customary bits of scenery that a flyer will just naturally hang up on." she said, 'I have landed in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the Gulf of Mexico, at least 50 rivers, including the Mississippi– Oh! I have landed in all kinds of outlandish places, and I could never enumerate them all.'

" 'I have landed on a moving freight train and twice on moving passenger cars and escaped unhurt. I fell in an insane asylum twice and a prison yard three times, all in one week, in New Westminster, B. C.' "

Atlanta Georgian, November 17, 1922: --

After this interview, Belmont returned to performing and in 1923, was once again seriously injured. She finally retired as an aeronaut in 1925. She died in San Diego in 1961 at the age of 72.

1916

(October 19-21)

EDWARD STINSON, Aviator

Edward "Eddie" Stinson was the third aviator to fly at the Northern Arizona Fair. Originally, another aviator was scheduled to appear at the Fair. He was billed as "Little Laddy Laird." Laird had built his own biplane in 1915, which he dubbed "Boneshaker." The plane's performance was remarkably good, and he used it for his exhibitions before loaning it to Katherine Stinson for her much-heralded tour of Japan and China in 1916-17. Laddy Laird (also spelled "Laddie") was not well-known in 1916, but he had a press agent who was determined to solve that problem by making up outlandish stories about the aviator's exploits. The agent was, even by the standards of day, completely over the top in his willingness to assign unearned accolades to the young flyer. Before too long, Laird parted company with the agent and returned to using his initials, "E. M.," for his billing while toning-down the hyperbole. Emil M. "Matty" Laird, became one of the most famous aviators in the country, as well as a respected designer and builder of aircraft.

For whatever reason, Laird did not perform at Prescott. His friend, Eddie Stinson flew in his place. Under the headline, "Big Crowd Attends Opening Of Annual Northern Arizona Fair," the following three daily reports appeared in the October 25, 1916 edition of the *Weekly Journal-Miner,* page 5:

Report from Friday, October 20

"Soaring 2,000 feet in the air, Edward Stinson, El Paso aviator, thrilled the crowd in the grandstand by suddenly darting downward, with the nose of his machine pointing perpendicular, and then turning a complete revolution. Believing that he had lost control of the machine, the crowd raised up as one person, only to fall back again with a relived sigh.

"Despite the tricky air currents Stinson raised from the ground promptly at the scheduled time. After climbing to an altitude of 2,000 feet and looping-the-loop several times, the intrepid aviator circled around the field, darting up, careening, turning the heavy machine around within its own length and then flew gracefully to the ground."

Report from Saturday, October 21

"Edward Stinson again thrilled the crowd yesterday by rising to an altitude of 3,000 feet and making three complete loop-the-loops. Stinson raised from the ground promptly at 3 o'clock and after making several wide circles to test the air currents, headed straight for the sun until he reached the desired heighth. Swooping downward, he caught the heavy machine and threw it over backward three times in succession while the crowd loudly applauded.

"After performing this daring feat, Stinson again thrilled the grandstand by flying over the top of tall pine trees and narrowly missing the tops. He was in the air more than 15 minutes.

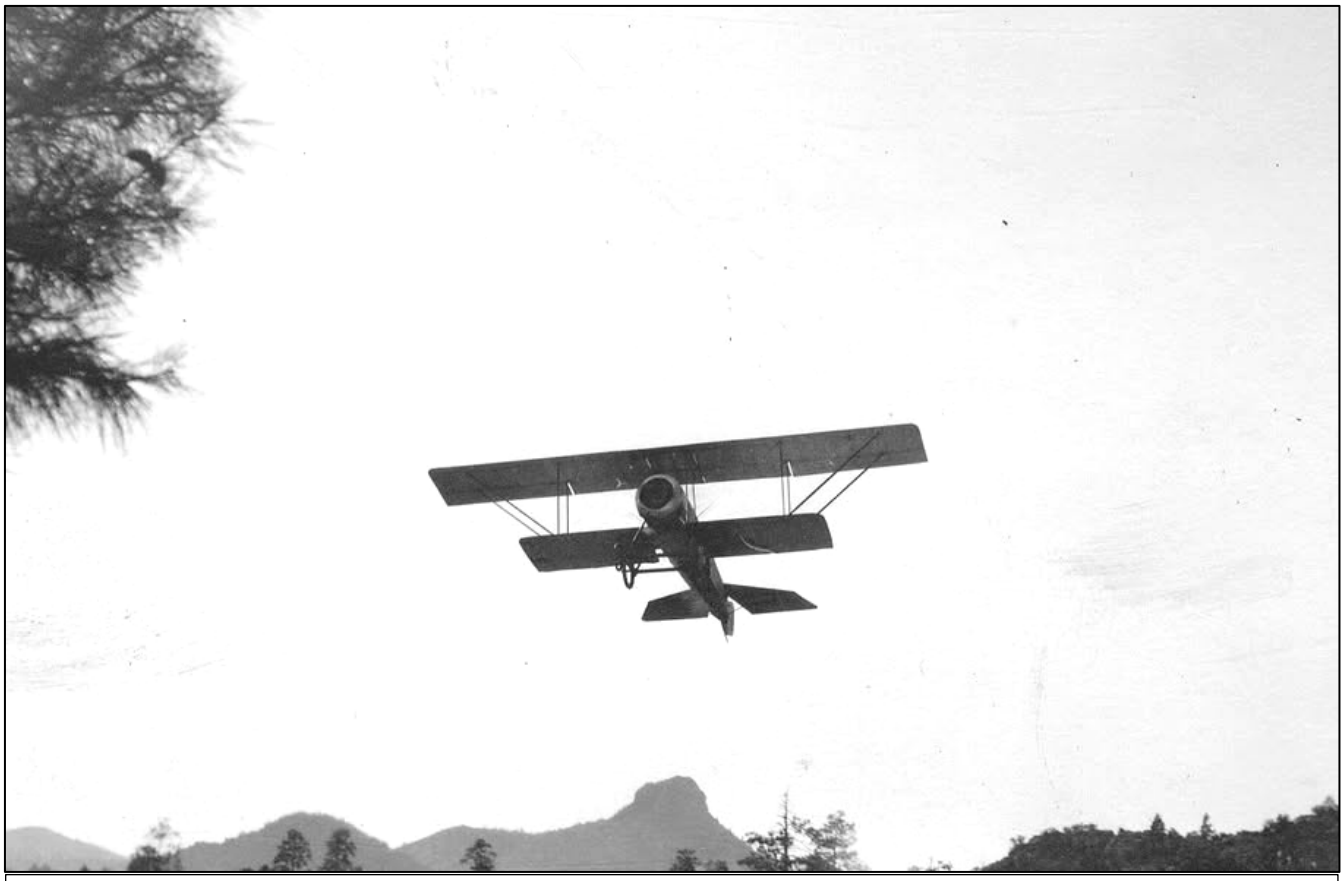
" 'After I reached an altitude of about 1,000 feet it was so cold that my teeth chattered,' Stinson said after landing yesterday."

Report from Sunday, October 22

"Edward Stinson made the best flight of the three days' program. Seven successive loop-the-loops were accomplished by the El Paso aviator, which is considered one of the most dare-devil feats ever performed by an airman in Arizona. Treacherous air currents made the accomplishment much more dangerous than in lower altitude."

The airplane flown by Stinson at Prescott was not described in newspaper reports. However, a photograph exists of the plane flying over the Fairgrounds. So far, it has not been matched to a photo of any known type of airplane from that period. Stinson and his sisters flew a variety of modified, one-off biplanes and monoplanes built by Partridge-Keller and Matty Laird. Eddie Stinson, himself, made major modifications to some of the planes he flew. The plane pictured over the Prescott Fairgrounds in 1916 appears to be a modified Partridge-Keller biplane, with shortened wings, and most likely powered by an 80-hp Gnome rotary engine.

Edward Stinson was taught to fly by his sister, Katherine, who was among the most famous and accomplished aviators in the world. Like Laird, he made a reputation for himself as a pilot, airplane designer, manufacturer and businessman. Unlike Laird, who lived to the age of 87, Stinson was killed in a 1932 airplane crash at the age of 38.



Edward "Eddie" Stinson performing over the Prescott Fairgrounds during the 1916 Northern Arizona Fair. Stinson's plane was not described in newspaper reports, but this is most likely a modified, one-off version of a Partridge-Keller biplane. (*Sharlot Hall Museum Library & Archives, pb026a4i3*)

Stinson's exhibition in Prescott marked the last time the Fairgrounds was used for takeoffs and landings by pilots performing over that venue. The Great War, as it was unfolding in Europe, and the 1918 flu pandemic contributed to a pause of aerial exhibitions at Prescott. However, following the Armistice, there still remained a need to raise money, via the sale of bonds, to pay for America's war effort. And the resulting Liberty Bond and Victory Loan tours would bring more airplanes to Prescott.

Landings 1919–1926

Known, documented airplane landings in the vicinity of Prescott
prior to the establishment of Ernest A. Love Field (work in progress)

DATE	AVIATOR(S)	AIRCRAFT	LANDING FIELD (and notes)
1919 APR	Capt. L. E. Appleby and Lt. H. E. Sturcken	Curtiss JN-6HG-1 150-hp Hisso (A.S. 44737)	a field west of the Fairgrounds; then another field in Miller Valley; then the Whipple Barracks Target Range [evaluating landing fields]
1919 JUN	Capt. L. E. Appleby and Lt. Ira Eaker	Curtiss JN-6 150-hp Hisso	Whipple Barracks Target Range
1919 JUL	Lt. R. S. Worthington and Sgt. Mason	Curtiss JN-6 150-hp Hisso	Whipple Barracks Target Range [Frontier Days]
1919 JUL	Capt. L. E. Appleby and Mrs. Appleby	Curtiss JN-6 150-hp Hisso	Whipple Barracks Target Range [Frontier Days]
1920 OCT	Otto Enderton and Bob Carns	Curtiss Standard (J-1) 150 hp	Whipple Barracks Target Range and Jerome Junction [Northern Arizona State Fair]
1920 JUL	unknown	"big army flying machine"	damaged on landing (Target Range?); freighted to Tucson for repairs [Frontier Days]
1921 JUN	Lt. Alexander Pearson and Sgt. Arthur Juengling	de Havilland DH-4B 400-hp Liberty 12 (A.S. 68124)	Whipple Barracks Target Range [Grand Canyon survey flights]
1921 JUN	Hal H. Bullen and Lt. Alexander Pearson	Curtiss Standard (J-1) 150-hp Curtiss Kirkham 6 [or Pearson's DH-4B]	Whipple Barracks Target Range (minor damage on landing)
1921 JUL	Lt. Alexander Pearson and Sgt. Arthur Juengling	de Havilland DH-4B 400-hp Liberty 12 (A.S. 68124)	Whipple Barracks Target Range [Frontier Days]
1921 DEC	Rex Smith, Jack Kleespie (and Frank Dorbrandt?)	Standard J-1 "8-cylinder Hispano"	Miller Valley landing field [barnstorming]
1922 AUG	Royal V. Thomas	Lincoln Standard (J-1) 180-hp Hispano-Suiza ("Thomas Special")	Lonesome Valley; then Miller Valley ("Dameron Aviation Field") [barnstorming]
1924 JUN	Russell Hall	probably a Navy surplus Aeromarine 39	Miller Valley ("the old Campbell pasture")
1925 JUL	Lt. Leonard D. Weddington and Sgt. W. H. Markell	de Havilland DH-4 400-hp Liberty 12	landed on the "Dolly ranch fields" instead of the Target Range [Frontier Days]
1926 MAR-JUN	Frank Clarke, C. H. West and Robert Hausler	probably a Curtiss "Canuck"	Whipple Barracks Target Range
1926 MAR	Capt. E. G. Ervin and Carlton H. Force	de Havilland DH-4	"field adjoining the Prescott gun club traps" [*not* the Target Range] [Air Mail survey flight; proposed LA-KC airway]

WHIPPLE BARRACKS TARGET RANGE

Description and History

The Whipple Barracks Target Range was not adjacent to or even particularly close to Whipple Barracks (old Fort Whipple, today's Bob Stump VA Medical Center). It was a separate tract located about 4½ miles north of downtown and variously described as 1640 or 1680 acres – a little more than two and one-half sections. By Presidential order, the land was reserved in 1904 "for the purpose of providing a target range for the troops at Whipple Barracks, Arizona Territory" (War Department, General Orders No. 154, September 16, 1904). At that time, Whipple Barracks was home to a battalion of infantry (said to number about 500 troops).

> "The target range, five miles north of Whipple Barracks, gives us a range for rifle practice that is only limited by the range of the rifle itself. For artillery practice it presents a range for both direct and indirect fire that is also limited only by the range of the artillery. The country is rolling and covered in part with chaparral, which is never dense, and presents the best of cover for training of troops. Cavalry and artillery can in large forces move over this territory for miles at any gait, without finding serious obstacles to their movements."
> – Col. J. C. F. Tillson
>
> "Experts Praise Whipple Barracks." *Yavapai Magazine,* Vol. IV, No. 9 (Sept. 15, 1916): 8

Whipple's fortunes as a garrisoned Army post began to wane and by 1913 it was in caretaker status. It was reactivated by the Army in 1918 as a hospital. With many major upgrades and additions, it has continued in that capacity to the present, though under a succession of federal agencies (Army > Public Health Service > Veterans Bureau > Veterans Administration).

Meanwhile, the target range was used intermittently as a militia range by the Arizona National Guard. There were periods of inactivity as evidenced by a revocable grazing lease granted by the War Department for the entire 1680 acres in 1928. According to Worcester Bong and Mick Woodcock in their book, "Fort Whipple" (Arcadia Publishing, 2025), "In early 1932, the target range was licensed to the Arizona National Guard for military training maneuvers, which continued for 40 years."

In 1961, aided by federal and state legislators, the first large parcel of the former range, 160 acres, was transferred to the Dept. of the interior, Bureau of Land Management, which in turn granted a patent for the construction of Prescott College. At some point, probably after 1972, federal management of the entire tract was transferred to the Bureau of Land Management. The boundaries continued to contract as other portions were sold or transferred by the federal government. (Some time after 1948, a 40-acre parcel was *added* to the tract in the southwest corner of Section 9, according to topographic maps, perhaps in error.) In 1980, it was reported that 700 acres remained of the tract, and the State Land Department, Yavapai County and the City of Prescott were all pressing for its full transfer. The "Whipple Military Reservation" continued to be depicted on USGS topographic maps as late as 1981.



FIRST AIRPLANE TO FLY TO PRESCOTT AND LAND

This photograph is believed to have been taken on April 23, 1919, as Capt. L. E. Appleby and Lt. Harold E. Sturcken were preparing to takeoff in their Curtiss JN-6 "Jenny" at the Whipple Barracks Target Range. (It is possible, but less likely, that this was the 2nd plane to land at the Target Range, flown by Appleby and Lt. Ira Eaker on June 11, 1919.)

Made with a large-format camera by local professional photographer, Tom Bate, it is an exceptional image on several levels – composition, sense of action and the local importance of the event. Thousands of photos and snapshots of visiting biplanes on improvised landing fields were taken during this period in the United States, but most show only a crowd milling around and partially obscuring a parked plane.

The orientation of this photo is difficult to determine with certainty, but it is probably looking south or southwest. It's not hard to imagine the campus buildings of Embry-Riddle in the background. *(Tom Bate photo)*

Landing Field

On April 23, 1919, Capt. L. E. Appleby and Lt. Harold E. Sturcken, of the U.S. Army Air Service, flew a Curtiss JN-6 "Jenny" from the State Fairgrounds in Phoenix to Prescott. This is believed to be the first airplane to *fly to and land* at Prescott. Their mission was to evaluate and select the most suitable landing field for future Army flights. On arrival, they flew low over the Prescott Fairgrounds, their intended landing site, but chose instead to land in a field just west. Later in the day, Lt. Sturcken "tested" a field in Miller Valley. Finally, they were driven out to the Whipple Barracks Target Range. They liked what they saw and followed-up with a landing there. Their flight and their mission is described in greater detail in the section, "Pilots and Planes" (p. 26).

In a detailed newspaper story, Capt. Appleby was quoted as saying: "We have not found a more desirable landing field since leaving Rockwell Field." It was common for transient military aviators to say something complimentary about any civilian landing field, even when they had to bite their tongues. They might offer some advice and constructive criticism, but the goal was to encourage, not discourage. However, in the case of Prescott, they were being sincere. Yuma's first airport, a necessary stop for Army and Navy cross-country flights over the southern airway, was far from ideal. And then there was Phoenix. The Army, from 1918 through much of the 1920s, alternated between disappointment and outright disgust at the state of landing facilities in the capital city. The State Fairgrounds landing field was the only option in 1919 and it had a number of deficiencies. Capt. Appleby was genuinely pleased with what he found at Prescott.

The two flyers departed for Kingman Wednesday afternoon, staying there only long enough to greet the chairman of the Victory Loan Committee and refuel before continuing on to Rockwell Field. Kingman's landing field had been hurriedly selected in December 1918 by a flight of Army de Havilland DH-4's in need of a place to set down. It turned out to be a good choice. Subsequent Army flights used the field and it became Kingman's first municipal airport.

The Whipple Barracks Target Range served as Prescott's primary designated landing field for the next seven years. When the Army Airways Section began publishing landing field directories, Prescott appeared as follows:

> "PRESCOTT.— Emergency; altitude, 5,000 feet; no accommodations on field; supplies in town; good roads; information from mayor; 4¾ miles north of town; long axis east and west."
>
> "Airways And Landing Facilities" (Air Service Information Circular Vol. V, No. 404). Washington: Chief of Air Service, Airways Section, March 1, 1923 (p. 18)

> "PRESCOTT.— Emergency; long axis east and west; 5,000 feet elevation; supplies available in town; located 4¾ miles north of town. Available indefinitely. Last reported in 1920."
>
> "Arizona," *Aeronautical Bulletin, State Series No. 143.* Washington: Airways Section, Chief of Air Service, February 1, 1924 (p. 3)

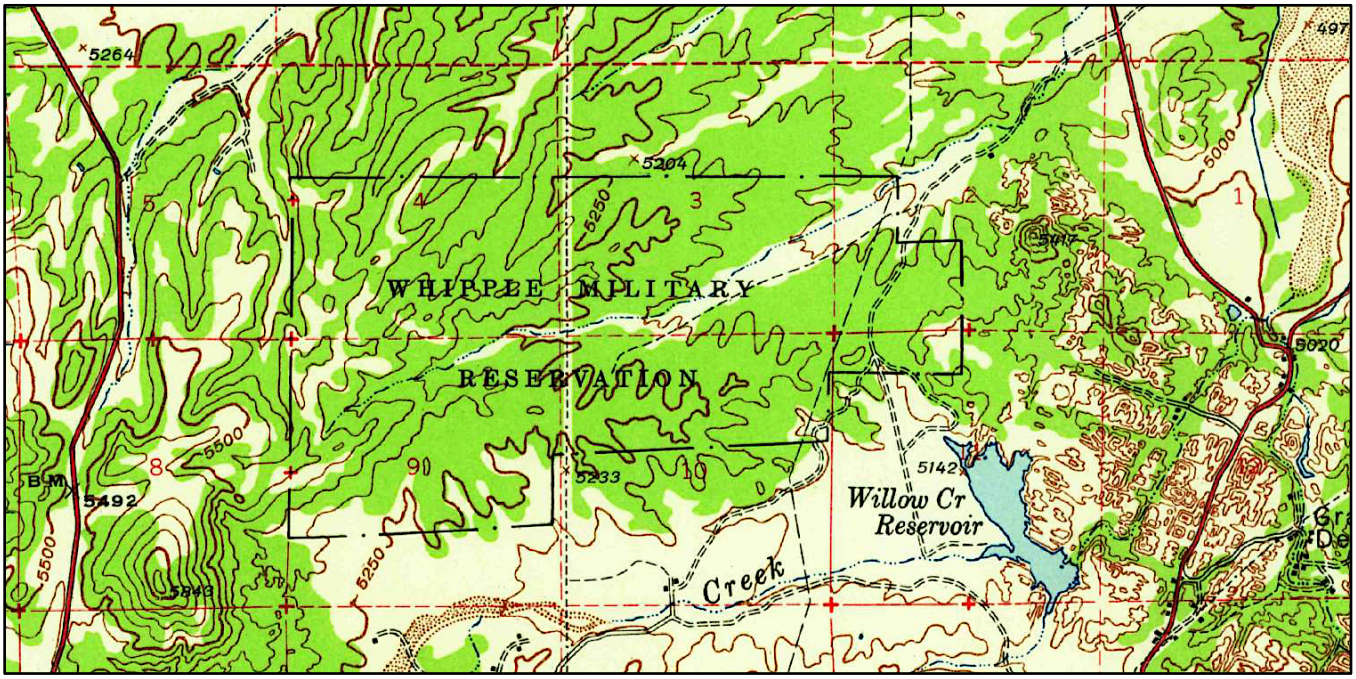
The term, "emergency," was not a commentary on the quality of the landing field itself, but simply the classification for an undeveloped landing field with no services on site. The vast majority of landing facilities at that time (including Phoenix) were classified as "emergency."

Landing Field Location

Today, Pioneer Park and the campus of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (which purchased the original Prescott College campus in 1978) lay directly over the old range. The landing field was in the long, wide drainage at the east end of the tract. In a 1919 newspaper story about the arrival of Appleby and Eaker in their Curtiss Jenny ("Pilots and Planes," p.28), the reporter described their landing after "the ship finished circling the open glade." That "glade" is readily apparent on topographic maps, and is prominent in the

background of some early aerial photos of Ernest A. Love Field. The glade, which remains clearly discernible today, is in the northeast corner of the Target Range tract, oriented southwest–northeast. The landing field itself was described as being oriented east–west, although that may not have been precise. Where the actual runway was within the roughly 4,500-foot-long glade will probably never be known. The surface that was prepared and conditioned for landing would have been about 2,000 feet or less. It may have favored the southwest end or the northeast end, perhaps extending northeast past today's Willow Creek Rd. Due to the proximity of a granite butte near the northeast end, it's more likely that the runway was in the middle of the glade or closer to the southwest end.

The main ERAU campus complex lies just south of the site, while Dobberteen Dr. and Hass Blvd. roughly define the alignment of the landing area. The main campus parking lots would probably represent the southwest end of the field. Fittingly, Embry-Riddle's Air Force and Army ROTC buildings stand on opposite sides of the ground where Lt. Ira Eaker landed his Curtiss JN-6 in 1919 and Lt. Alexander Pearson landed his DH-4 in 1921.



The Whipple Military Reservation (Target Range) as depicted on the 1947 USGS / USFS Prescott Quadrangle (1:62500). Williamson Valley Road is at left. Highway 89, Granite Dells and Willow Lake are at right. Willow Creek Road has not yet been built.

MILLER VALLEY

Fairgrounds

The first heavier-than-air flying machines that took to the skies of Prescott did so at or near the Prescott Fairgrounds (also known as the rodeo grounds). While it's true that they took off and landed there, it is nevertheless, hard to think of the Prescott Fairgrounds as a landing field. The altitude and surrounding terrain provided additional hazards for an already hazardous activity. The exhibition pilots of that earliest era faced all kinds of unique dangers as they performed around the country. However, it's likely that those few birdmen who performed at the Northern Arizona Fair had the experience etched in their memories. Most of the low-altitude racetrack, ballpark or arena flying fields of the period were marginal. The formula for Prescott's Fairgrounds was: marginal + 5,400 feet + gusts + granite. The danger involved was evidenced by the abbreviated performances and the scheduled flights that were wisely cancelled altogether.

Miller Valley Landing Field / Dameron Aviation Field 1919–1927

It's hard to imagine today just how undeveloped Miller Valley was in 1920. Surrounded by hills, it was otherwise relatively flat, open and spacious, easily able to accommodate landings and takeoffs by the biplanes of the day. It wasn't Miller Valley's destiny to remain that way much longer. By 1921, the sprawling pastures were being subdivided into lots for homes and truck farms. This was the inevitable direction that Prescott would grow in the years prior to WWII. The Dameron, Homeacre and Lineback additions had been surveyed and divided. Lots were being sold and houses were beginning to appear.

In the meantime, there still remained enough open space for itinerant aviators to land. Between 1919 and 1927, several recorded airplane landings were made in Miller Valley, and perhaps a few that weren't recorded.

Reports usually failed to specify exactly where in Miller Valley the landing was made, but it's likely that most occurred on or near the same tract, sometimes referred to as the Dameron Aviation Field. This was on property owned by H. A. Dameron and presumably adjacent to his Dameron Subdivision. The area would be *roughly* bounded today by Whipple Street on the north, W. Hillside Avenue on the south, Valley St. on the west and N. Lincoln Ave. on the east. Emphasis is on the word "roughly" because the actual horse pasture that doubled as the landing field may have been an outlier.

The last documented landing in Miller Valley occurred on June 5, 1927, when Russell Boardman and his passenger, Henry W. Crowther, touched down there. This was a year after Prescott's airport had been established, but newcomer Boardman said he was unaware of the municipal field. Perhaps encouraged by Boardman's use of his Miller Valley field, the following January, H. A. Dameron made a pitch to city officials to establish an airport on his tract.

AIRPORT OFFER IS LOOKED INTO

"This morning an investigation of the possibilities of an airport on the H. A. Dameron tract in Miller Valley was made, but the lay of the land, its size, prevailing wind currents, and surrounding residences were considered drawbacks and the idea has been discarded, temporarily at least.

"Dameron, well known local realtor, stated verbally that he was willing to convert a stretch of ground more than a half-mile long and 1,200 feet wide into a landing field, equip it with hangars, and maintain it, if the city would put in the Summit street-Lincoln avenue crossing.

[...]

"Dameron's land extends from Lincoln avenue to the ice plant, a distance of more than a half-mile. The land slopes gently toward the plant.

[...]

"Aside from these drawbacks, the Dameron proposal would be ideal, insofar as its proximity to Prescott is concerned. But under existing conditions, it seems that the present airport near the Dells must satisfy the desire for a municipal landing field. That field, it is understood, can be used indefinitely by Prescott, and it has every desirable feature except its removed position from the city.

"Based on the statements of airmen to the effect that the Dells field is the best undeveloped field in the entire country, the members of the chamber of commerce aviation committee are understood to be working out a number of important details that will lift it out of the undeveloped class into one of distinct recognition."

Prescott Evening Courier, January 25, 1928: 1, 3

Commendably, city leaders gave serious consideration to all of the important factors in this proposal. They also consulted aviator, Russell Boardman, who happened to be in town. Boardman's advice was sound. Among other things, he emphasized that an airport in Miller Valley would never "receive the proper classification from the government" and would soon become inadequate. In 1922, Dameron had announced that he planted 1000 shade trees on his tract. Over the next two decades, Miller Valley began filling with homes and businesses. It was not the place for Prescott's airport.

The process demonstrated that the chamber of commerce aviation committee had gained a good grasp of airport issues.

THE FLIGHTS

Pilots and Planes

1919 April 22-23

CAPT. L. E. APPLEBY and LT. HAROLD E. STURCKEN

On April 22, 1919, two Army Air Service officers based at Rockwell Field, San Diego, flew their 150-hp Curtiss JN-6 "Jenny" from Phoenix to Prescott. This is believed to be the first airplane to *fly to and land* at Prescott (as opposed to being shipped by rail for an exhibition). Capt. L. E. Appleby and Lt. Harold E. Sturcken came up from the State Fairgrounds in Phoenix to participate in Prescott's Liberty Bond campaign and to scout locations for landing fields at Prescott and Kingman. They were an advance party for the Army's Victory Loan Flying Circus, which was to perform in Phoenix on May 9th. According to news accounts, including the detailed story below, the aviators originally planned to land on the Prescott Fairgrounds, which had been dragged and conditioned for the occasion. However, after making a low pass, they opted instead to land in a field just west of the Fairgrounds. Later that day, Lt. Sturcken (with an empty front cockpit, most likely to decrease weight), made a short flight and "tested" another field in Miller Valley which he found to be satisfactory. However, after the aviators had been "driven about and shown all the desirable landing fields nearby," they were unreserved in their preference for the Whipple Barracks Target Range location.

While in Prescott, Lt. Sturcken performed for the crowds gathered for the Victory Loan Parade, part of a nationwide drive to encourage the purchase of Liberty Bonds. The two flyers were treated to a luncheon and they paid their respects to the parents of Ernest Love.

The following article from the *Weekly Journal-Miner* is presented here nearly in its entirety because it provides a detailed description of a single event that was foundational to Prescott's early aviation history. The report appeared in the edition of April 30, 1919, although the report was from Thursday, April 24, the day after Appleby and Sturcken departed Prescott.

HAPPY LANDING OF AIRMEN IS A GOOD OMEN

" 'We have not found a more desirable landing field since leaving Rockwell field, than that at the Target Range, north of Prescott,' said Captain L. E. Appleby and Lieutenant H. E. Sturcken, aviator from Rockwell field who visited Prescott Tuesday and Wednesday [April 22-23].

"While the Fair grounds had been placed rather hurriedly, in condition for the landing of the plane when it was definitely known that it would arrive, yet the airmen deemed it advisable, after viewing the ground at about a ten foot elevation to land in the field west of the Fair grounds. This clearly shows that the experienced bird men who are making cross country flights are prepared to land on small areas when necessary.

"Tuesday afternoon, Lieutenant Sturcken took off the landing field and made a short flight, testing a field in Miller Valley, as a temporary and emergency field. This proved to be an excellent field, but when the officers had been driven about and shown all the desirable landing fields nearby, they were loud in their praise of the Target Range, both stating that Prescott need have no fear but that any plane, now in operation by the United States government could be landed on this field with safety.

"Some few weeks ago, this field had been dragged and the prairie dog holes and small ruts filled in, preparatory for the landing of some planes from Ellington Field, but the officials of the Chamber of Commerce and Whipple Barracks were rather skeptical as to the desirability of this ground for landing, but this has all been set aside now since the aviators from Rockwell field blazed the air trail." [to the disappointment of Prescott officials, the expected "Gulf-to-Pacific" flight from Ellington Field had bypassed Prescott]

90 Miles From Phoenix

"Following the permission granted by Colonel H. H. Arnold, A. S. A. RMA, the two aviators left the State Fair grounds at Phoenix, Tuesday morning at nine o'clock, landing at Prescott at ten-fifteen, mapping an air route of ninety miles. In making the flight the maximum altitude attained was 10,000 feet above sea level. The flight was made from Phoenix to Wickenburg, following directly the line of the Santa Fe railroad. In fact the aviators had much sport in flying above one of the Santa Fe trains. They then passed over the country to the east of Wickenburg, flying due north to Kirkland, thence northeast over the mountains to Prescott.
[...]

"The machine flown by the aviators is a Curtis bi-plane, 150 H P with a Hispana Suiza [Hispano-Suiza] motor, with a maximum possible speed of 150 miles an hour.

"This being the first government plane to visit this section of Arizona, it naturally created a great deal of interest, not only locally but as the word spread out that the plane had arrived many from the outside points came in time to see the exhibition flight made by Lieutenant Sturcken just preceding the big Victory Loan parade, which was the largest and best parade held in the Mile High City. Lieutenant Sturcken made an excellent flight and dropped down hundreds of cards into the crowds gathered on the Plaza and about the business and residential sections. The cards bore the following inscriptions: "Remember such men as Love, Theobold, Morrow, Pitts, Davis, Majors, Russell, King, Kinsman, Jones. They Gave Their Lives. You invest your dollars.
[...]

Off for Kingman

"Photographs of the plane both upon the grounds and during the flight were made by Tom Bate yesterday. Also a panoramic view of the landing field. The aviators left the Target Range early yesterday afternoon and arrangements were made for the taking on of gas and oil at Kingman, which will be the only stop between Prescott and Coronado [Rockwell Field] [...]

"Due to the arrangements which were made by Manager Campbell, of the Standard Oil, when the flight of planes was expected from Ellington Field, Prescott was fortunate in having on hand a supply of high test gasoline and Liberty Motor oil.
[...]

"Lieutenant Sturcken suggested a few minor improvements which will make the Target Range an ideal landing place. The Lieutenant stated that when he landed on the Target Range that it was as smooth as a table and that they hardly knew he had reached the ground.
[...]

"The officers yesterday paid a visit to Mr. and Mrs. Allan Love as a mark of admiration and respect for their fellow airman, Ernest Love, who also was of Rockwell Field.

"Both officers stated in bidding goodbye to Prescott that their visit to Arizona had been one pleasant surprise after another, and expressed their sincere thanks..."

Weekly Journal-Miner, April 30, 1919: 2
[report from Thursday, April 24]

1919 June 11
CAPT. L. E. APPLEBY and LT. IRA C. EAKER

In June 1919, Capt. Appleby returned to Phoenix with another contingent of Rockwell Field aviators as part of a recruiting effort, probably to capitalize on the interest generated by the Victory Loan Flying Circus a month earlier. The State Fairgrounds landing field would again be used as a base from which planes would visit other Arizona cities and towns.

On June 11, Appleby made another visit to Prescott, this time accompanied by a 23-year-old lieutenant named Ira Eaker. Their purpose was to get the ball rolling on an Air Service recruiting campaign in Prescott. They also intended to take some aerial photographs of Whipple Barracks. He told local officials that "chances were good" that he would be able to bring his entire detachment and their planes to Prescott for the upcoming July 4th Frontier Days celebration.

Capt. Appleby made arrangements to return to Phoenix by automobile, leaving Lt. Eaker with an empty seat. Prescott's indomitable Grace Sparkes was invited to accompany Eaker on his return flight to the State Fairgrounds. Sparkes wrote a wonderful story about what she described as "the most delightful trip of my life" (*Weekly Journal-Miner,* June 11, 1919, p. 5). As anyone who knew her would expect, she managed to pack the story with eloquent descriptions of Yavapai County's beauty, this time from an aerial perspective.

The pair lifted off of the Target Range, keeping the Sante Fe tracks in sight until reaching Congress Junction. From there, Eaker flew a direct course to Phoenix. According to Sparkes, they had been flying against strong headwinds and when they reached Glendale, the plane ran out of gas. Lt. Eaker skillfully negotiated an emergency landing in a cotton field without damage or injury. After taking on fuel, a barbed wire fence had to be cut to allow for a safe takeoff from the soft field. The short flight to the Fairgrounds was uneventful, ending with a perfect landing.

Sparkes was particularly proud that she had not become "seasick in the air." She was also pleased that Lt. Eaker let her continue the flight:

> "Lieut. Eaker congratulated me upon what he termed my 'nerve' in making the trip and said that the only reason he let me get back in the machine at Glendale was because he knew I had enjoyed the flight so much that he would not disappoint me by making me take an auto into Phoenix, even though we had made a forced landing and takeoff in a rather undesirable location for such a purpose."

The young lieutenant had been a rated pilot for less than nine months. One can only imagine a smile coming to Grace Sparkes' face during World War II whenever she read about Lieutenant *General* Ira Eaker, commander of the mighty 8th Air Force.

A few days prior to Sparkes' flight, Lt. Eaker had flown a writer for the *Arizona Gazette*, Mrs. Maude Makemson, from Phoenix to Tucson and back. Mrs. Makemson was touted as the "first woman who ever made a flight from one Arizona town to another." It was probably true and if so, that would make Grace Sparkes the second woman to do so.

In her newspaper story, Sparkes wrote, "*I fully believe that as more people make flights and learn the real joy of riding where there are no traffic policemen, no dust or dirt, that flying will become an ordinary thing."* That was in 1919. She carried that vision with her in the years that followed as she continued to lend her formidable support to the development of an airport at Prescott.



Lieutenant General Ira C. Eaker, 1896–1987. Army Air Service, Army Air Corps, Army Air Forces and United States Air Force.



As a postscript, later in June Capt. Appleby's Phoenix-based detachment met with a series of setbacks. First, the alfalfa field that doubled as the Phoenix Fairgrounds runway was unexpectedly irrigated, rendering it unusable for a few days. What came next was an almost unbelievable sequence of mishaps and misfortunes.

To augment the Curtiss Jennys already at Phoenix, five more planes were dispatched from Rockwell Field to participate in the Frank Luke Memorial Tournament at the Fairgrounds. This included two more Curtiss Jennys, a DH-4, a German Fokker and a LePere combat plane. Combined with the two Jennys that were still airworthy in Phoenix, a total of seven planes were expected to participate in the Luke Tournament. Afterwards, Capt. Appleby's squadron planned to pull up stakes at the Fairgrounds and fly to Prescott for Frontier Days. From Prescott the detachment had orders to extend the recruiting drive into Colorado by way of Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Pueblo and finally, Denver.

Unfortunately, only two of the planes from Rockwell Field made it to Phoenix, and one of those, the DH-4, hit a ditch and flipped over on landing at the Fairgrounds. The LePere got lost and crashed at Needles, Calif. The Fokker, "after various misadventures in the Imperial Valley," cracked-up near Yuma.

While trying to perform the first aerial delivery of newspapers in Arizona, one of the Jennys planted itself on the roof of a home in Mesa. Still other planes were reported to have been damaged at Tucson, and Douglas. All of this occurred in the space of just a few days. There were no serious injuries, but Appleby was running out of planes. Of the seven ships expected at the Luke Tournament, only two Jennys flew. Not surprisingly, the detachment's

orders to Colorado were rescinded and all personnel were recalled. The widely-scattered wrecks were freighted back to Rockwell Field.

Remarkably, Capt. Appleby kept the Army's commitment to fly at Frontier Days, taking those last two airworthy Jennys to Prescott.

1919 June 30-July 4
LT. ROBERT S. WORTHINGTON and SGT. MASON
CAPT. L. E. APPLEBY and MRS. APPLEBY

Despite the tribulations described above, Capt. Appleby gathered the flyable remains of his squadron and departed the State Fairgrounds for Prescott, arriving in time for Frontier Days. Lt. Robert S. Worthington, accompanied by Sgt. Mason, left on June 30 in a red Curtiss Jenny. Sgt. Mason, Master Signal Electrician, was said to be from Yavapai County. Capt. Appleby and his wife followed the next day in a white Jenny. The paint jobs were holdovers from the Victory Loan Flying Circus of the previous spring.

Operating from the Target Range landing field, Lt. Worthington made exhibition flights over the city. In addition, a few airplane rides were auctioned off as a fundraiser for the Frontier Days Association. Worthington also had the opportunity to visit with two of his former Stanford classmates, both prominent citizens of Prescott.

Lt. Worthington departed Prescott for Rockwell Field on July 4, stopping to refuel at Kingman. Presumably, Capt. and Mrs. Appleby left around the same time.

1920 July (Frontier Days)
Unidentified Army Aviator(s)

On July 7, 1920, the *Weekly Journal-Miner* reported that a "big army flying machine" was expected to arrive for Frontier Days. On July 14, the newspaper reported that "the flying machine which came up for the Frontier show and which was slightly damaged in landing, has been dismantled and will be shipped by rail back to Tucson." No additional reports have yet been found.

1920 October 14-21
OTTO ENDERTON and BOB CARNS

The next recorded landing at the Target Range was made by Otto Enderton. When his wheels touched the ground, he became the first civilian pilot to *fly to and land* at Prescott. Enderton was flying for the short-lived Arizona Aviation Company in Tucson, which was one of the state's earliest aviation corporations. The outfit claimed to have established "the first commercial air fleet in the Southwest," operating a Curtiss Oriole, a Curtiss JN-4 and a "Curtiss Standard" (a surplus Standard J-1 purchased and modified by Curtiss).

Trying to generate revenue for the new company, Enderton and mechanic, Bob Carns (also spelled Karns), had been hopping passengers and dropping Standard Oil handbills

around the Verde Valley. According to one account, pilot L. J. "Dogie" Andrews used the Curtiss Standard to fly U.S. Senate candidate, Ralph Cameron, from Phoenix to Clarkdale the previous month. On approach to the prepared landing field at the Clarkdale Country Club, the plane exhausted its fuel and had to make a forced landing under wires and through a couple of fences. It reportedly remained in the Verde Valley for several weeks undergoing repairs and awaiting a new propeller. Once its airworthiness was restored, the plane barnstormed the Valley with Enderton replacing Andrews as pilot.

Enderton and Carns left Clarkdale on October 14, flying over Mingus Mountain and across Lonesome Valley to arrive at Prescott in time for a contracted appearance at the Northern Arizona State Fair. On October 15, it was reported that Enderton was at the Whipple Barracks Target Range and had begun "taking passengers up for short flights above Prescott." He also managed to scatter more advertising leaflets. On the 18th, the *Prescott Evening Courier* reported that although many prospective passengers came to the Target Range, flights had to be suspended because his 150-hp biplane was not "powerful enough for passenger-carrying at this altitude." [The Standard should have performed nominally at Prescott in October, even with two passengers up front. It's likely that the plane was suffering some mechanical malady, perhaps as a result of its previous adventures).

Trying to leave Prescott proved to be challenging for Enderton and Carns. First, they departed the Target Range with a passenger, intending to take him to Clarkdale. They landed at Jerome Junction to top off the gas tank before starting over the mountains. Approaching the west side of Mingus Mountain, they encountered fierce winds and wisely decided a retreat was in order. They returned to Jerome Junction to wait for conditions to improve, but ultimately chose to abandoned their plans and return to Tucson. However, it wasn't until the 21st that the winds subsided enough for the airmen to embark on their trip home.

A graduate of Nogales High School, Otto Enderton had been a Marine Corps aviator during WWI. After his discharge, he worked as a barnstormer, air circus performer, movie stunt pilot, air racer, manager of Tucson's municipal airport (circa 1920), CAA inspector, corporate pilot and more. By the time he retired, he had a remarkable aviation resume that will have to be the subject of a another story.

1921 June 12, 21-22
LT. ALEXANDER PEARSON, SGT. ARTHUR JUENGLING and HAL H. BULLEN

In the January 28, 1921 edition of the Army's *Air Service News Letter* (Vol. V, No. 4), the following report appeared under the headline, "Grand Canyon Development":

> "A request has been received by the Secretary of War from the Secretary of the Interior asking for airplane co-operation in the Grand Canyon, for geological work and for an estimate as to whether or not commercial planes might operate in the Canyon successfully for carrying passengers and viewing the world-famed wonders of the Canyon from the air. [...] A project is being prepared whereby an airplane will be sent from the Eighth or Ninth Corps Area to the Canyon to spend two weeks looking over the possibilities, finding landing fields and generally making an estimate so that subsequent action can be taken."

On June 10, 1921, Prescott newspapers reported that Lt. Alexander Pearson of the Army Air Service had come from Douglas to Prescott "one day last week" for the purpose of inspecting the landing field on the Whipple Barracks Target Range. His actual arrival in Prescott was June 2. Lt. Pearson was already a nationally-known flyer as a result of his record flights and air racing, as well as his inevitable mishaps and other adventures. He was a skilled pilot, utterly fearless and evidently level-headed enough to continue receiving high-profile assignments from his superiors. Stationed along the southern border at Nogales and Douglas, Pearson was now under orders to locate and evaluate good landing fields at Prescott, Ash Fork, Williams, Flagstaff and ultimately, both the South and North Rim areas. He was now engaged in planning the series of experimental flights over the Grand Canyon requested by the Dept. of the Interior. This would include making aerial surveys of the area and gathering meteorological data, particularly with regard to air currents, for the two federal departments. Pearson hand-picked Sgt. Arthur Juengling to accompany him on the mission, serving as mechanic and photographer.

Although it was not completely clear, for this preliminary tour Pearson was apparently taking the train. At Prescott he made friends quickly as, according to a news report, he "wandered" around town asking questions that were pertinent to his plans. Grace Sparkes accompanied him to the Target Range where he satisfied himself that the landing area was in good condition. At that point in time, part of the landing field was being maintained by Whipple Barracks as a 9-hole golf course. In the evening, Pearson was invited to a Chamber of Commerce planning session for the upcoming Frontier Days events.

By June 4, Pearson was at the South Rim conferring with the superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park. The following day, accompanied by the Chief Ranger, he "went down in the Canyon to look over the plateau." He then returned to Nogales, arriving on the 8th. There, he immediately began preparing for the Canyon expedition. His plane was a de Havilland DH-4B equipped with a 400-hp Liberty 12 engine and extra fuel and oil tanks for extended range. After only one night in his quarters, he departed Camp Stephen D. Little Airdrome and flew to Williams, which he had reconnoitered on his previous trip. An impromptu "aviation field" at Williams, stocked with the proper grade of gasoline and oil, would be his base of operations for the Canyon survey flights. That same field, just northeast of Williams, was dedicated as "Webber Field" in 1925, becoming the town's first municipal airport.

The first of Pearson's Grand Canyon flights was made on June 10. The next day he flew to the Canyon by way of Flagstaff, San Francisco Peaks, Little Colorado River, Painted Desert, Marble Canyon and Kaibab Plateau, finally landing at Big Park north of the North Rim. Pearson was the first aviator to alight at Big Park, a wide, natural landing field surrounded by miles of dense forest on the Kaibab Plateau. He was impressed and stated that he had no difficulty making the takeoff, even in the summer at 8,800 ft. In the years that followed, Big Park (also known as V.T. Ranch, De Motte Park and Kaibab) became the designated North Rim landing field.

The next morning, Sunday the 12th, Pearson and Juengling flew from Williams to Prescott, landing on the Target Range. They spent a couple of hours in Prescott visiting friends, then returned to Williams. Over the next several days, Pearson explored every aspect of flying over, across and through the Grand Canyon. On some occasions he encountered serious turbulence, especially below the rim, which he described as "very unpleasant." He also evaluated potential landing fields at or near the South Rim. On the 18th, Pearson announced that he had concluded his survey work at the Canyon.

The same day, Hal H. Bullen, a Salt Lake City aviator, landed his Curtiss Standard at Williams following a flight from Kanab, Utah. It has been suggested that the meeting was coincidental, but it's more likely that it was prearranged. Bullen was a former Army pilot and president of the Utah Airplane Company. That company was Utah's version of the Arizona Aviation Company, closely mirroring the latter firm's optimism, operations and ultimate fate. Both ventures were, unfortunately for their investors, a few years ahead of their time. On this trip, Bullen was conducting preliminary geological surveys in Utah and Arizona for future mineral exploration, while also investigating the commercial aviation potential of the Grand Canyon. For some time, he had been particularly interested in operating scenic flights from Salt Lake City to and over Yellowstone and Grand Canyon National Parks. He may have been the first to seriously evaluate the feasibility of such a service. This was a full year before the Kolb Brothers began their aviation contemplations and more than six years before Scenic Airways made full-scale air tourism at the Grand Canyon a reality.

A detailed report of Pearson's Grand Canyon flights was published in the *Air Service News Letter* on July 13, 1921 (Vol. V, No. 26), pages 3-4. Pearson's final Canyon flight was described as follows:

> "On June 18th Mr. Hal H. Bullen arrived at Williams from Kanab, Utah, flying a Curtiss Standard with 150 h.p. Kirkham 6 Curtiss Motor. The weather was ideal – cool and no wind. Lieut. Pearson took off at 7:50 A.M. for the Grand Canyon and returned at 9:50 A.M. Moving pictures were made of this flight under authority of the Chief of Air Service. Flying conditions were like those of the first day and there were no bumps even at the Canyon walls."

Following the departure of Pearson and Juengling, the June 24 edition of the *Williams News* further described the final flight:

> "The Lieutenant had completed his work in Williams, including the taking of pictures of the Canyon. [...] Pictures were first taken from the rim, showing the aviator in the Canyon. Sgt. Juengling next took the camera and took pictures of the Gorge and Canyon, from the plane piloted by Lieut. Pearson."

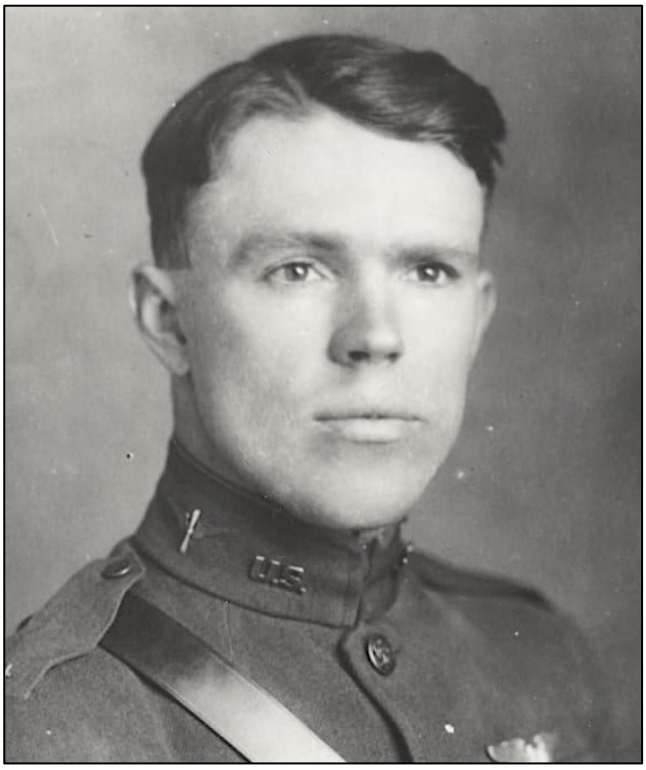
In late afternoon on the 21st, Bullen and Pearson flew from Williams to Prescott. It isn't known which plane they were flying, Pearson's DH-4 or Bullen's Curtiss Standard, or who was flying. There were reports that the men had previously flown each other's plane, so it could have been either. In any case, when they touched down at the target range "a tire was blown and the landing gear sunk into a little wash." Prescott's city manager came out with a crew the next morning and "extricated" the plane. (The need for extrication may indicate that it was the larger and heavier DH-4.) Pearson and Bullen then returned to Williams, and from there, Bullen flew to Kingman and resumed his aerial geological survey. Pearson received orders the same day to return to Nogales "at once."

It should be noted that Lt. Pearson was not the first to fly over the Grand Canyon. Other Army Air Service pilots had already done that. In February 1919, Lt. R. O. Searle and Lt. E. D. Jones became the first to fly over the Canyon as part of the "Gulf-to-Pacific" flight of DH-4's from Ellington Field, Houston. The day after Searle crossed the Canyon, the other two planes of the Ellington group followed suit, with Lt. C. V. Rugh and civilian photographer, Louis Lewyn, metaphorically dipping their toes into the Canyon by descending 600 feet below the rim.

Also, Lt. Pearson did not land below the rim, as erroneously reported by some newspapers. However, his was the first comprehensive and methodical evaluation of flying conditions over and in the Canyon. He also identified potential landing sites and made aerial surveys of the vast area surrounding the national park.

Pearson's commanding officer noted that "a total of 14 flights for a total of 22 hrs. and 5 minutes were made above and in the vicinity of the Canyon" over a period of two weeks. The aviator's final report to the Army and Park Service dispelled the "expert" opinions, speculations and outright tall tales that had circulated about flying at Grand Canyon. It contained many recommendations, but the conclusion was that "commercial flying across the Grand Canyon and its vicinity is feasible and practical." Stephen Mather, Director of the National Park Service, was receptive and open-minded in reviewing the information, but he made it clear that he intended to proceed with deliberation. He wrote in his 1921 annual report that the time for aviation in the Park had not yet arrived. Nevertheless, the door had been opened to the prospect of air transportation to and over the Grand Canyon.

Succeeding flights of military and civilian aviators confirmed Pearson's findings and continued to prove that flying in and around the Grand Canyon was no different than flying in any other part of the Mountain West.



Lt. Alexander Pearson

There was a final element of Pearson's Grand Canyon mission that received very little notice. On June 22, when he and Bullen parted company, Pearson received orders to return to Camp Little Airdrome at once. It isn't clear if he received the orders at Williams or Prescott. The few reports available indicate that his return trip originated in Prescott, so perhaps he and Sgt. Juengling packed-up at Williams and flew to the Target Range. Whether "at once" was intended to mean that he should leave in the evening or depart the next morning is unknown. Pearson chose to leave immediately, in the early evening, on what would be a remarkable night flight.

The few reports that appeared later stated that the two men departed Prescott at 7:30 p.m. for their return to Nogales. Even with some remaining twilight and a nearly full moon, it was an extraordinary flight for that period. Pearson and his intrepid mechanician reached Nogales three hours later, at 10:30 p.m. Camp Little Airdrome was just north of town. It was a confined airfield surrounded by hills. They landed successfully without benefit of lights on the field or the plane.

In 1921, night flying was in its infancy. At airfields around the country, Army and Navy pilots were just beginning to conduct night flying experiments, usually staying close to the field on nights when the moon was full. Airway (en route) navigation aids were nonexistent and airfield lighting was still experimental, largely consisting of repurposed searchlights. Some of this experimental work had recently been conducted at Camp Little by another Army lieutenant, again, staying reasonably close to the field on a clear night when the moon was full. Cross-country night flying was still very rare, particularly over sparsely-populated, mountainous terrain. Pearson, having previously ventured some distance from Fort Bliss on night flights, was continuing to push the envelope.

1921 July 4-6
LT. ALEXANDER PEARSON and SGT. ARTHUR JUENGLING

According to some sources, in 1921 the Army decided to restrict Fourth of July exhibition flights. In response, Senator Ralph Cameron pulled some strings and requested that the Army allow Lt. Pearson and Sgt. Juengling to return to Prescott during Frontier Days. Accordingly, they were detailed to fly "for the entertainment of the sick men at Whipple Barracks."

The *Journal-Miner* reported that Pearson "drove the same ship with which he conquered the canyon – a De Havilland with a 400-horsepower Liberty motor," landing on the Whipple Target Range. The flyers arrived on the 4th. They stayed for two days and on July 5, a long round trip was made over Roosevelt Dam and back to Prescott:

> "Pearson and his mechanician, Sergeant Arthur Juengling, in the course of a flight of 2 hours, 45 minutes from the target range, circled the post, the town, and the grounds and took a little side trip to the Roosevelt Dam."
>
> *Weekly Journal-Miner,* July 6, 1921: 1

The next day, July 6, they flew west "nearly to the Colorado river" before returning over Prescott and then heading south to their station at Camp Stephen D. Little Airdrome in Nogales.

1921 December 8-11
REX SMITH and J. J. KLEEPSIE

Samuel Rex Smith was the quintessential 1920s barnstormer. In his war-surplus Standard J-1 biplane, he was meandering southward from Salt Lake City, trying to escape the Utah winter and its unfavorable effects on his livelihood. His eventual destination was

the borderlands of southern Arizona. His unannounced arrival in Prescott on December 8, 1921, was just one of several stops along the way. Crossing the Grand Canyon just a few months after Lt. Pearson's historic survey flights, Smith landed at Williams, where he performed and gave rides before next dropping in on Prescott. There, he circled the downtown to signal his arrival before he and his mechanic, J. J. "Jack" Kleepsie, alighted on "the landing field in Miller Valley."

The following afternoon, Smith headed back downtown for an impromptu (and free) exhibition:

> "Swooping down almost to the level of the tree-tops in the plaza, circling over the court house to rise and then drop and turn breathlessly in a spiral, indulging in feats of gliding, looping, volplaning, Rex Smith, Salt Lake City aviator, yesterday treated crowds of spectators to a thrilling series of stunts in an impromptu half hour of exhibition flying.
> [...]
> "The exhibition was an appreciated one. As Secretary Grace Sparkes of the chamber of commerce put it, it was better than a previous exhibition for which the chamber of commerce paid out $1,500."
>
> "Flyer Thrills City In Stunts Above Plaza." *Weekly Journal-Miner,* December 14, 1921: 3 [report from December 10]

The comment by Grace Sparkes was apparently a jab at Otto Enderton's lackluster performance at the Target Range in October 1920, which had been attributed to the poor high-altitude performance of his Standard.

Smith's aerial exhibition was so appreciated (again, it was free) that the Chamber of Commerce and *Journal-Miner* began encouraging one and all to go out to Miller Valley and take a ride. By all accounts, there was no shortage of paying customers. According to the *Journal-Miner*:

> "A nominal charge is made for a flight of from 10 to 15 minutes. A passenger can enjoy a straight air voyage or they can have all the thrills that are known to airdom by so notifying the aviators."

The "nominal charge" was more precisely described in the *Williams News* when Smith was selling rides in that city: "one dollar per minute spent in the air."

Barnstormers throughout the country charged whatever the local market could bear. On average though, ten dollars for a 10 or 15-minute ride was pretty common. While that price may seem low, it was equivalent to nearly $200 today. The average person didn't pay that much on a whim. They were buying a once-in-a-lifetime experience. And that's what they got. Those flights were never forgotten.

For a creative and vivid description of the experience of riding with a true barnstormer, we turn again to the *Williams News*:

> "Rex was besieged with requests for rides. He was not averse and soon upwards of a dozen would-be birdfolk had contracted for a ride in his aerial bus.
> "Rex was a little startled to learn that all of the passengers in prospect included in their requests, a full exhibition of "all he had" in the way of thrills to be included in their bargain for a flight. He was game and accordingly dosed out loop-the-loops, tail spins, nose dives, falling leaf antics and other stunts to his full capacity. Most of the Williams people who partook of this new thrill had not ridden in a plane before, yet not one of them showed the white feather.

"The impressions of those who made the flight were much alike. None denied that the aviator had dished up a goodly number of real thrills. One common thrill accompanied the combined loop and tail spin. Each one declared that this was the greatest thrill of all. They said that the plane acted all right and stayed under them where it belonged but the earth went on a spree of drunken carousal. First it would be overhead where it did not belong, and then it would be alongside of them and again when they were fully convinced that the earth had suddenly jumped above them and tried to take another look at it there, they would find that it had switched back beneath and was in its former position."

Williams News, December 9, 1921: 1

During his stay in Prescott, Smith chanced upon his former barnstorming partner, Frank Dorbrandt. Like Smith, Dorbrandt was an ex-Army pilot. He was also an experienced "wing walker." He reportedly offered to perform on Smith's plane the following day, which would be the last day in Prescott. Whether Dorbrandt did actually perform with Smith in the air show over Miller Valley is, for the time being, unknown.

December 11, the last day, was scheduled to include more rides and a final stunt flying exhibition at 1 p.m., followed by the departure of Smith and Kleepsie for Phoenix. En route, the flyers planned to land at Castle Hot Springs, intending to be the first to do so.

REX SMITH

Originally from Glenwood Springs, Colo., Rex Smith received his aviation training in the Army Air Service during World War I. Discharged in 1919, he enrolled at the University of Colorado. However, he was soon lured back to an aviator's life, barn-storming throughout Colorado and other parts of the Rocky Mountain region. Through most of 1921, he made Salt Lake City his headquarters. After his 1921-1922 foray into Arizona, he continued on to California.

Earning a living in the air during the 1920s could be a struggle. The number of trained aviators far exceeded the number of steady flying jobs. Rex Smith made some bad decisions. In 1922, he was accused of flying an escaped convict to the Mexican border. Clara Phillips, dubbed the "Tiger Woman," had been serving time for the hammer murder of her husband's alleged paramour. Smith was arrested, but it doesn't appear that he was formally charged. However, in 1927 he was again arrested as part of an organized ring smuggling foreign nationals across the Mexican border by airplane. This time he was convicted and sentenced to several months in a federal prison. At that point, his flying career appears to have come to an end.

J. J. KLEEPSIE

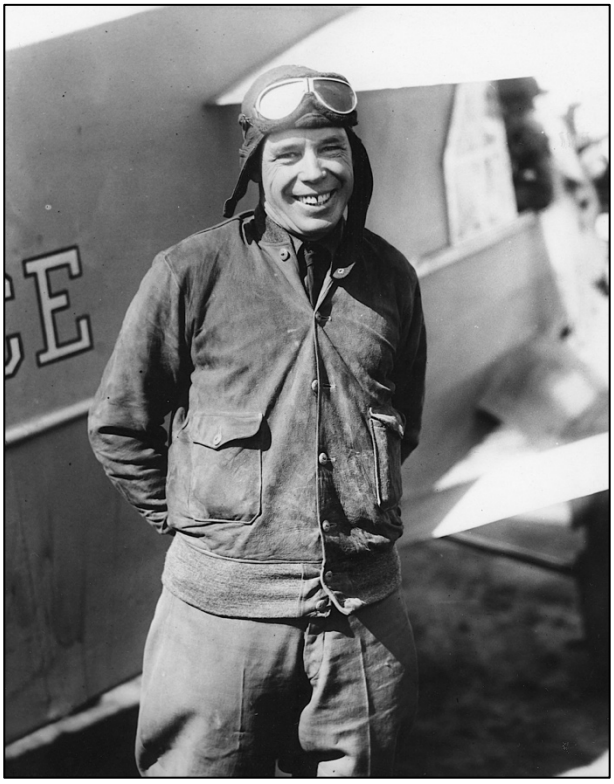
Little is known about Smith's mechanician, J. J. "Jack" Kleepsie. On February 9, 1940, the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* reported that J. J. Kleepsie, an employee of Pan American Airways, had boarded the China Clipper in San Francisco, destined for Guam. No other references have been found.

FRANK DORBRANDT

Frank Dorbrandt, who may or may not have performed with Rex Smith at Prescott, journeyed south and spent a good portion of 1922 in southern Arizona and El Paso. Eventually moving to Alaska, he earned fame there as an early aviator and air service operator. Considered a pioneer of Alaska aviation, he was often cited for heroism. However, like Smith, his career became somewhat checkered.

In 1935, Dorbrandt's hand was injured by an airplane propeller while he was preparing to start the motor. While recovering, he developed a fatal case of pneumonia. Prior to his death, he had faced mounting legal and personal problems.

1922 August 19-28
ROYAL V. THOMAS


Royal V. Thomas

In August 1922, another barnstormer came to Prescott. Harvard-educated, Royal V. Thomas, arrived from Williams amidst a brief wave of notoriety for being the first person to land an airplane *in* the Grand Canyon. Thomas, another former Air Service lieutenant, was flying his "Thomas Special," a modified Lincoln-Standard J-1 powered by a 180-hp Hispano-Suiza engine.

In collaboration with the Kolb Brothers, famed Grand Canyon explorers, a photographic flight was planned in the Canyon, culminating in a landing near the bottom. With Ellsworth Kolb as passenger and photographer, they departed Williams on August 8 and followed the railroad north. Once over the Canyon, they flew past the crowds at the El Tovar Hotel and along the South Rim before descending. They maneuvered at length up and down and through the great chasm, all the while taking photos. Some reports said Kolb's motion picture camera malfunctioned early in the flight. Nevertheless, they produced many stunning pictures.

Thomas climbed again to within 1,000 feet of the rim before pointing the nose down and descending to the crude runway that he, along with some park rangers and cowboys, had cleared on the plateau near Indian Garden (today's Havasupai Gardens). The landing was successful and more photographs were taken. According to reports, Thomas secured the plane and left it on the plateau before mounting a mule for an ascent to the South Rim. The following morning he hiked back down to discover that the wind had moved the plane enough to break the tailskid. After repairs, a takeoff from the tiny landing area – probably the most hazardous part of the whole undertaking – was made without too much drama. Thomas had made history and he had the pictures and witnesses to prove it. Several days later, he landed on the plateau a second time for the benefit of a Fox Film motion picture crew.

Thomas left Williams and headed to Prescott on August 19. He had wired ahead and a welcoming committee was waiting for him at the hastily spruced-up Target Range. He landed instead in Lonesome Valley, where he flagged down a passing motorist and hitched a ride into town.

The aviator spent more than three weeks in Prescott. He arranged to use the "Dameron Aviation Field" in Miller Valley to sell rides. On the evening of September 8, he gave a presentation on his Grand Canyon flight at the Elks Theater, complete with

photographs. Saturday and Sunday, September 9 and 10, would be his last days in Prescott and he promoted rides and promised a flying exhibition on Sunday.

One reason for his lengthy stay and apparent downtime in Prescott may be explained by a postcard that recently surfaced. It is a photograph of two women in the front cockpit of Thomas' Lincoln-Standard at Prescott. On the back is the handwritten notation (as written):

> "This airplane was wrecked in landing at Prescott Ariz in Aug 1922 it had 2 lady passengers, besides the pilot No one was hurt The accident occured when the aviator dodged a herd of horses and struck a ditch – picture was taken after plane had been repaired."

Earlier, Thomas had commented about "a slight delay with his machine." After hopping passengers over the weekend, he was off to Phoenix on Monday.

1925 July 1-3
LT. LEONARD D. WEDDINGTON and SGT. W. H. MARKELL

Early in her tenure as secretary of the Yavapai County Chamber of Commerce, Grace Sparkes learned that if you send the right letters in the right quantity to the right people, you often get results. And so it was with her request to Gen. Mason Patrick, Chief of Air Service. It was 1925 and she thought it would be appropriate for the Army to send its airplanes to Frontier Days, inasmuch as Prescott's designated landing field belonged to the War Department. The Army had not dropped in for Frontier Days since 1921, and in Grace's mind it was high time.

She got results. The Air Service commander at Fort Bliss, Texas, received orders from Washington. Sparkes was told that the planes at Fort Bliss were already committed to Independence Day and Defense Day events, *but* "one plane will be sent to Prescott on July 1, this plane will remain at Prescott July 2, and return to Fort Bliss, July 3." That one plane, a de Havilland DH-4, was piloted by Lt. Leonard D. Weddington. This would be the first of several visits to Prescott for Weddington during the years that followed. Prescott was a good fit for this particular Army flyer. He made lasting friendships and endeared himself to everyone he met. At some point, the Frontier Days organizers started reserving a seat for him atop the old Concord stagecoach in the parade. On his future visits, he often brought along other Army aviators.



Lt. Leonard D. Weddington

On this first trip, Weddington chose to land on "the Dolly Ranch fields" instead of the Whipple Target Range. These fields would probably have been somewhere around the north or northwest periphery of Granite Dells, not far from the Target Range.

Among his many early exploits, Weddington was one of the pilots on the Pan American Goodwill Flight around South America in 1926-1927, for which he

received the Distinguished Flying Cross from President Coolidge. Like Eaker and Ervin (below), he rose through the ranks and served with distinction during WWII, retiring in 1946 as a brigadier general. His connection with Prescott was so unique and enduring that he will be the subject of a separate biographical sketch.

1924 June 6
RUSSELL HALL

Russell Hall was flying from Phoenix to Winslow on June 6, 1924, when he stopped for a brief visit in Prescott. He reportedly circled the city three or four times, then landed on "the old Campbell pasture" in Miller Valley. Hall was probably flying a surplus Navy Aeromarine 39. He left the plane in the pasture and, according to a story in the *Winslow Daily Mail,* when the *Prescott Evening Courier* went to investigate, the reporter found what looked like a government plane with no one around. There also appeared to be bullet holes in the wings. The *Courier* did its part to generate a cascade of rumors and suppositions about secret missions, bootleggers, etc. Later in the afternoon, with his business concluded, Hall quietly returned to the skies and continued to Winslow, where he was scheduled to perform for the upcoming Fourth of July celebration. A resident of Winslow, Hall kept a succession of planes at the Winslow landing field. At some point he moved to California and by 1929, he was flying for Pickwick Latin American Airways.

1926 March 3-4
CAPT. ROBERT G. ERVIN and CARLTON H. FORCE

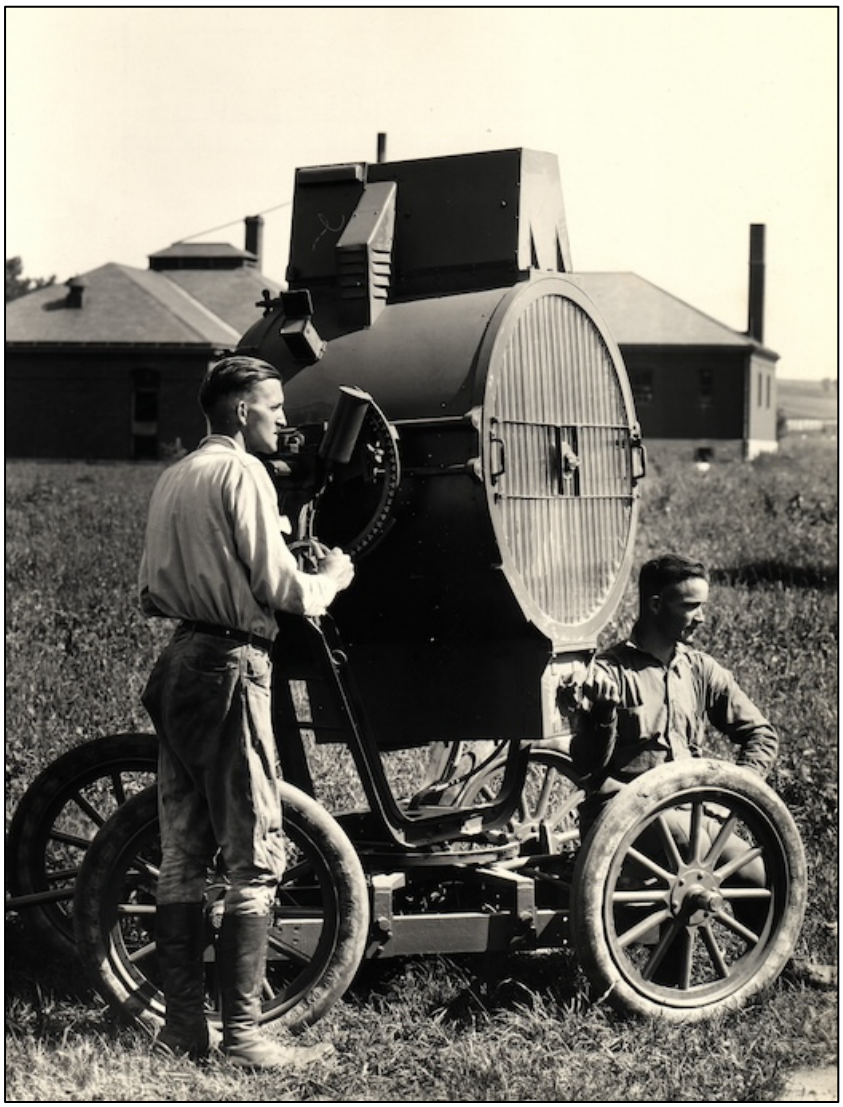
In February 1926, it was announced that potential Air Mail routes would be surveyed in Arizona. This created an immediate stir. At the urging of Bob Hausler, early airport promoter and ex-barnstormer, a conference was scheduled in Prescott to which representatives of several Arizona cities and towns were invited. Originally, Capt. Robert G. Ervin and Capt. Lowell H. Smith were to fly to Prescott to address the gathering and answer questions. Smith had been one of the Army's famed "Round-the-World" flyers. However, poor weather forced Ervin to postpone the trip (instead, he flew to Tucson and attended the rodeo).

On March 3, the rescheduled flight departed Los Angeles, but Smith was replaced by Carlton Force of the U.S. Air Mail Service. Ervin and Force arrived by way of Kingman, probably flying a de Havilland DH-4. The two men were conducting a preliminary survey of potential Air Mail airways, including portions of the route between Los Angeles and Kansas City, as well as a branch route extending from Las Vegas to Douglas by way of Kingman, Prescott, Phoenix and Tucson.

Capt. Ervin was another pioneering Army Air Service pilot, with a logbook already full of trailblazing flights, particularly across the Southwest. He survived this hazardous stage of aviation development and rose through the ranks to take senior command positions in Europe during WWII, retiring as a brigadier general. During the war, Ervin was an original member of Gen. Ira Eaker's 8th Air Force "Castle Coombe Mess." With so many shared

experiences, like piloting balky, fabric-covered biplanes over the mountains and deserts of Arizona, Ervin and Eaker remained lifelong friends.

Carlton Force was Assistant Superintendent of the Central Division of the Air Mail Service. As Chief Mechanic at Offutt Field, Omaha, a few years earlier, he had been a key figure in preparing the original transcontinental airway for night flying. When the Post Office Department retired its planes in 1927, Force joined National Air Transport, one of the new Air Mail contractors.



Carlton H. Force (L) and James King, U.S. Air Mail Service, adjusting a new Sperry 36" wheeled floodlight at the Omaha Air Mail Field (Offutt) in 1923. *(U.S. Post Office Department)*

Bob Hausler, who orchestrated the meeting, had been residing in Prescott since about January. He was already working on establishing an airport, while also exploring business opportunities and campaigning for what he called the Tri-State Airway across northern Arizona and New Mexico.

Among other things, Ervin and Force were evaluating existing and potential landing fields. For whatever reason, Capt. Ervin landed on the "emergency field adjoining the Prescott gun club traps," not to be confused with the Whipple Target Range. The location of the traps is hard to determine because the gun club moved once or twice during that period and precise locations were rarely described in local news stories. The traps may have been in the vicinity of Watson Lake at that particular time. In any event, Ervin later examined the Whipple Target Range landing field and declared it superior to the field he had chosen.

Ervin and Force addressed a dinner conference at the Owl Dining Hall in the evening, and then departed for Albuquerque at 9 a.m. the next morning, expecting to arrive by noon. Before setting their course, they "circled over the courthouse in an aerial au revoir."

Despite the excitement that it caused, the flight itself was several years premature. Air Mail routes wouldn't be extended into Arizona until 1930. The Air Commerce Act, passed in May 1926, turned responsibility for the nation's airways over to the Department of Commerce. The Army and Post Office Department would retain only advisory roles in the development, construction and maintenance of the airways.

1926 March-June
FRANK CLARKE, DR. C. H. WEST and ROBERT HAUSLER

Frank Clarke and Robert "Bob" Hausler figured prominently in the establishment of Prescott's municipal airport.

On or about March 22, 1926, Clarke made the first of several flights to Prescott. While this may have been his first landing at Prescott, in 1926 there were few civilian aviators more experienced at flying across the deserts and mountain ranges between Southern California and Arizona. At the time, he was the most famous of Hollywood's movie stunt pilots. On these Prescott trips, Clarke was probably flying a Curtiss "Canuck," the Canadian version of the JN-4 "Jenny." He was accompanied by Dr. C. H. West. Little is known about Dr. West, except that he was a Los Angeles-area aviator. They landed on the Whipple Barracks Target Range and used that field as the base for subsequent flights. These were probably the last landings at the Target Range, and in fact, it's probable that by May or June, Clarke was using the new Prescott landing field, today's Ernest A. Love Field.

Clarke's friend, Bob Hausler, had been residing in Prescott since about January 1926. The three men intended to explore the possibility of operating an airline that would specialize in scenic flights to and over the Grand Canyon. On March 22, Clarke and Hausler departed Prescott on the first of their survey flights to the North and South Rim areas. Dr. West was aboard for at least one of the Canyon flights that followed, and he helped grub and clear an improvised landing field somewhere near the Canyon rim.

Reports were infrequent, but it appears that these flights may have continued on and off through early June, with Clarke returning to Santa Monica for long periods. In early May, Hausler announced that he and Clarke were going to fly to Hasbrouck Heights, N. J., to purchase "an up-to-date Fokker passenger ship." Apparently that didn't happen. As late as mid-July, Hausler was still trumpeting the project, stating that a 10-passenger Fokker tri-motor would be in service by September. Those plans failed to materialize and by the end of the year, Hausler was working as a boilermaker at the New Cornelia mine in Ajo.



Stunt pilot extraordinaire, Frank Clarke, in the cockpit of his Curtiss JN-4 Canuck.

Very early on, Bob Hausler accurately envisioned the future airways, airports and airlines that would stretch across the Southwest, and he tried relentlessly to leverage his vision and find personal success. Unfortunately, it eluded him. It was hard to fully appreciate just how much capital would need to be aggregated before such lofty plans could become reality.

Hausler's contributions to the establishment of Prescott's airport will be described in Part 1 of the centennial history. In addition, he will be the subject of a separate biography.

Postscript: A Hazardous Profession

Aviation, in its earliest decades, was a particularly dangerous undertaking. The turn-of-the-century aeronauts capitalized on those inherent dangers to draw crowds and earn a living. They even added new perils when the crowds began to thin.

The advent of sustained, powered flight was an inspirational and transforming milestone for humankind, but for the pioneering practitioners, the risks did not abate. The Wright Brothers successfully flew their airplane in 1903. Wilbur Wright was killed in a plane crash in 1912. That 50% ratio of fatality versus long-term survival was not too far removed from the reality that existed in aviation for the first three decades of powered flight.

It's true that some of the daredevil flyers invited unnecessary risks. But the military and commercial pilots were trying to expand, in every possible sense, the performance and utility of airplanes. They were pushing and pounding on barriers. Without that, nothing is learned and progress stalls.

An informal review of the roster of aeronauts and aviators known to have visited Prescott between 1891 and June 1926 serves to confirm the sacrifices made in bringing aviation to some level of maturity.

Four aeronauts are known to have performed at Prescott. Of those, two were killed within weeks after their Prescott exhibitions. The other two, Keyes and Belmont, each

survived more than a decade of exhibitions before retiring. But not before experiencing a relentless succession of mishaps and physical injuries.

Eighteen aviators were identified as landing at Prescott during that period. (There were also a few pilots and mechanicians who were not identified.) After their appearances at Prescott, the fortunes of three of the 18 identified aviators are completely unknown (Nixon, Hill and Bullen). Of the remaining 15 whose fates are known, eight were destined to die as a result of airplane crashes:

The first two aviators to fly to and land at Prescott perished in crashes. Capt. Appleby in 1921 while landing at Marr Field, Chattanooga, and Lt. Sturcken in 1923 while flying a DH-4 from San Antonio to Dallas.

Lt. Worthington, who had visited his Stanford classmates in Prescott, was killed in 1927 when he lost power on takeoff from Wheeler Field, Honolulu, and fell into Pearl Harbor. The amiable and fearless Lt. Pearson died while practicing in a Curtiss R-8 for the 1924 Pulitzer Race. Sgt. Juengling, selected by Pearson for the Grand Canyon and Prescott adventures, was killed in 1922 while aboard a JN-4 that crashed in the Franklin Mountains near Fort Bliss, El Paso.

Royal Thomas, first to land in the Grand Canyon, died in 1928 while flight testing his Bellanca Pacemaker at Teterboro, N. J. Russell Hall, who landed in Miller Valley, perished in 1929 while piloting a single-engine mail plane between San Diego and Nogales for Pickwick Latin American Airways. Trapped in a storm, he wrecked during a forced landing near Jacumba, Calif.

Edward Stinson, who performed at the 1916 Northern Arizona Fair, died in the crash of his Stinson Model R in 1932.

All things considered, Hollywood movie pilot, Frank Clarke, had a surprisingly long career. However, he was killed in 1948 while flying a Vultee BT-15 near Lake Isabella, Calif.

Eight out of 15. It was a hazardous profession.

I don't believe in taking foolish chances, but nothing can be accomplished if we don't take any chances at all.

Charles A. Lindbergh



1919 – The first aviators to fly to Prescott. (*Tom Bate photo*)

ENDNOTES

1. Ruth M. Reinhold's book, *Sky Pioneering,* opens with a vivid description of a balloon ascension and parachute leap by a "daring lady aeronaut, resplendent in spangled tights," at Prescott's Courthouse Plaza on July 4, 1890. Despite exhaustive attempts, the author has been unable to find any primary-source references to this event. It appears that Reinhold's source *may* have been a newspaper feature that appeared in the 1960s or 1970s, wherein the event was confused with the 1901 performance of Miss Hazel Keyes.

2. For the 1920 Northern Arizona State Fair (Oct 14-16), it was announced that the "Famous Walter Raub Aeronautic Engineers" had been contracted to perform daily balloon ascensions and "novelty parachute exhibitions." The performers would have been Walter Raub and Stella Jaeger. The act was listed in advertisements in the days preceding the Fair. However, no report of balloon ascensions during the Fair could be found in either the *Prescott Evening Courier* or the *Weekly Journal-Miner.* With the exception of one paragraph in the *Journal-Miner* on October 20, reporting that on the third and last day of the Fair:

   > *"Good natured fair crowds were again disappointed at not seeing the balloon ascension and double parachute drop. As the big bag neared filling, it was tipped by a gust of wind and torn so that it deflated almost instantly."*

   From this brief report it may be reasonable to conclude that no successful balloon ascensions were made during the 1920 Fair. Two years later, Stella Jaeger (also "Yaeger"), was again booked to perform at the 1922 Northern Arizona State Fair (Oct. 19-21). Announcements appeared in the Prescott, Kingman, Winslow and Snowflake newspapers. However, no mention of the act appeared in the advertisements that were placed during the days immediately prior to the Fair, and no report of balloon ascensions during the Fair could be found. Apparently, Jaeger suffered near-fatal injuries during a performance in Kentucky just a few days before her scheduled Prescott appearance.

   A photograph has been circulated showing an inflated balloon at the Prescott Fairgrounds, with the notation "circa 1922." It is more likely that the photo was taken in 1920, perhaps just before the balloon was ripped, *or* in 1915 during one of Lucielle Belmont's balloon ascensions at the Fairgrounds.