

# MANY TRAGEDIES MARKED EARLY AIR MAIL HISTORY

(Continued from page four, main news section)

cause of air mail was J. D. Charlton, who crashed at Long Valley, N. J. in heavy weather on October 30, 1919. On March 10, 1920, Clayton Stover, a veteran flyer, was killed after his motor failed over New Paris, Ind.

### THREE DIE IN MONTH IN 1920

September 1920 saw three more pilots killed. Max Miller and Gustave Riers were burned to death when their Junkers all-metal monoplane fell near Morristown, N. J. Walters Stevens, who succeeded Miller as dean of the mail aces, met a similar death in the same kind of airplane near Pemberville, Ohio. Thirteen days later Fred Robinson failed to clear a cable near Millers-town, Pa., and fell to his death in the Susquehanna River.

### CHRISTENSON IS HERO

Pilot J. T. Christenson died a hero's death at Cleveland in 1921. The pioneer pilot was flying over the suburbs of Cleveland when his motor failed. A wide street below presented a probable safe landing spot, but entailed danger to any pedestrians who may have been on the street. Rather than risk killing or injuring anyone on the street, Christenson headed his ship into the lake and was drowned.

The next pilot to lose his life in the air mail was E. G. Leonhart, who crashed near Meadville on February 27, 1923. B. Hyde Pearson made his last landing near Curwensville in a blinding snow storm on March 7, 1924.

### FIRE DESTROYS HANGARS

The Bellefonte field was handicapped for two years after a fire destroyed the original wooden hangar. On November 15, 1919, a blaze which originated from an overheated stove in the office at the corner of the hangar resulted in the blaze which razed the building together with six DeHaviland planes and a brand new

Jenny which had never been flown. For two years the local crew, in charge of Maurice J. Kelley, of Bellefonte, worked without any buildings. Finally two all-steel hangars were erected to replace the one lost in the fire.

With the inauguration of night flying in 1925 the Beaver field was abandoned and a new field about five miles southeast of Bellefonte was leased. New buildings were erected, radio and weather reporting equipment installed and a new era began for the Bellefonte airport.

On July 1, 1925 Paul Collins and the ill-fated Charles Ames made the first night flight from Cleveland to New York. Three months later hundreds of persons in various parts of Pennsylvania were searching the mountains for Ames.

### AMES KILLED NEAR HERE

He left New York at 9:30 p. m. October 1, 1925 with enough gas to last four and a half hours. Next morning when he was unreported air mail officials began receiving reports that his plane had been seen in various localities the previous night.

A fireman on the Phillipsburg to Houtdale run said he heard a plane and saw it drop in flames. The pilot was sitting in the cockpit, his legs crossed under the control stick and with the upper part of his body hanging over the side of the ship. Death had come instantly, and his plane was reduced to junk as it cut a wide swath through the trees before crashing into the ground.

October 18, 1928 "Wild" Bill Hoppson was found dead in his plane which had crashed into the side of a mountain at Bear Hollow, three miles west of Polk, Pa.



Pilot Chas. H. Ames and Plane That Carried Him to Death

Ames Field at Kylertown, present emergency landing field on the New York to Cleveland run, was named in honor of Pilot Ames, one of the ablest and best known flyers in the air mail service.

Ames left New York October 1, 1925 with enough gasoline for 4 1/2



hours of flying. When he was reported missing the next day the greatest search in the history of the air mail began. October 11 a youth found Ames dead in the cockpit of his wrecked plane near the top of the mountain south of Hecla Park. His crash into the mountain apparently was entirely unexpected, for his feet were found crossed over the "joystick" of his plane, a position assumed by many pilots when going

### Pilot Harry W. Powers



This well known flyer was transferred to Bellefonte from Chicago in December 1918, and was in charge of the Bellefonte field until Mr. Kelley was named permanent manager. Powers later was sent to the Belmont Park field as manager.

### PILOT HORRIBLY BURNED

Pilot Irving L. Murphy was the victim of one of the most gruesome accidents to happen during the pioneer days of the air mail. Murphy, a new pilot in the service, was sent to Bellefonte to trail the regular pilot Robert H. Ellis to Cleveland, so the newcomer could familiarize himself with the route. Sunday April 18, 1920, Pilot Ellis carrying the mail took off from the Beaver farm, and a short time later Murphy in another DeHaviland, followed suit. When he reached an altitude of about 200 feet and while over the Humes farm, his plane was seen to fall and go into a spin. Crashing on the Humes farm, the plane burst into flames, with the pilot trapped inside by his safety belt.

Boyd Samsel, tenant on the farm, was the hero of the occasion when he rushed up to the plane, released the safety strap and lifted Murphy from the cockpit. Samsel was considerably burned himself in the act, while Murphy was rushed to the Centre County Hospital in serious condition. Much of the flesh was

box cars scrambled over the side to keep from being struck. He'd go into a loop or a spin upon the slightest provocation, and enjoyed the spectacular.

One day a farmer residing east of Bellefonte, and against whom Ellis had a grudge, was driving a herd of about ten bulls along the highway bordering the airport. Lewis saw a grand opportunity to "get even" and crawling into his ship he dived repeatedly at the herd of badly frightened bulls until they were scattered through three townships.

Another time Photographer Ralph L. Mallory, of Bellefonte, had gone to the field to take some photos of airplanes in flight. He had set his camera on a tripod in the center of the field and was making adjustments when Lewis, flying overhead, spotted an opportunity, and with the throttle wide open, aimed heading at Mr. Mallory. The photographer seeing the plane coming at him did just what you think he did. He ran.

Lewis came into the airport one night with a hole the size of a Boy Scout tent ripped out of the lower

The first continental mail flight in 1920 landed for fuel in Bellefonte. Taking off at San Francisco, the mail was landed at New York in slightly over 32 hours. Night flying was done entirely by compass, there being no light beacons or radio beams to guide the pilots.

### AIR MAIL BECOMES INDUSTRY

When private airlines took over flying the mail in 1925, much of the romance of the pioneering days was lost as scheduled flights became a serious business. Landing fields were equipped with flood lights to facilitate take-offs and landings; planes were improved; pilots had to pass rigorous tests of frequent intervals; the Department of Agriculture offered the use of its intricate system of weather reporting stations for the benefit of air lines; the airports of the nation were illuminated with beacon lights at about five mile intervals; radio signals were devised to keep a pilot on his course from the beginning to the end of his journey; blind flying in bad weather and at night became a major study; and in other ways the carrying of mail by

### Pilot Max Miller

This pilot was probably the best known ace in early air mail service. He was both a spectacular and dependable flyer and was possessed of qualities which made him a hero to practically all youngsters, and many grown-ups as well.

To Max Miller, the epitome of Bellefonte owe much for the prominent position this community occupied on the national air lanes in subsequent years, because it was Miller's recommendation after his first test landing at the Beaver field early in 1918 that the government choose Bellefonte as an intermediate stop on the New York to Cleveland route.

Miller and another ace pilot, Gustave Riers, were killed early in September, 1920, when a Junkers all-metal monoplane in which they were flying mail fell in flames near Morristown, N. J. The death of Miller was especially mourned by Bellefonte people, for many had come to know and to like him during his frequent overnight stays at the old Brockerhoff Hotel, which was the Bellefonte "headquarters" for air mail pilots.



air became as well conducted and well regulated as the railroads.

The Allegheny Mountain region, which sometimes was referred to as "Hell Stretch," because of the casualties suffered during the establishment of air mail, is no longer a menace to aviation. Not that the character of the country has changed. The same mountains, the same snow and ice storms, the same blank fogs and treacherous winds still prevail in the area.

The difference rests in the fact that men and machines have improved to the extent that they have virtually overcome those dangers. Put ace pilots of today in the junky old DeHavilands of 20 years ago, and without the many safeguards that have been developed in the past two decades, and the mountains and elements would again exact their heavy toll.

### Wiley Post, J. R. Turner, Harold Gatty



This photograph was snapped in the latter days of air mail history when Post and Gatty stopped overnight in Bellefonte while on an air tour of the country. Their plane is seen in the background. In the center is former Corporal John R. Turner, once stationed with the State Highway Patrol in Bellefonte, but now Chief of Police of Lock Haven.

Sentenced to Die Now Free Fred Trest, fifty-four, sentenced to be hanged in 1912 for the arsenic murder of her husband in Philadelphia, was ordered released from Eastern Penitentiary by Governor George H. Earle last week. Her original sentence was commuted to

life imprisonment by Gov. John K. Tener November 19, 1913.

Ban Jap Supplies Australian longshoremen have refused to load materials for shipment to Japan which they consider were to be used for war purposes. The

materials rejected included scrap tin, which could be used for munitions, talcum which could be used to manufacture glycerine and scrap iron which would also be used to make munitions.

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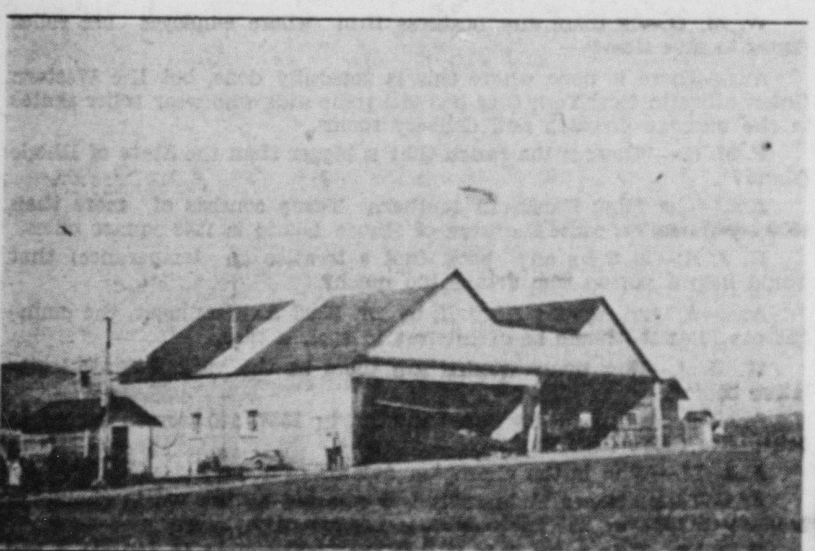
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### First Hangar at Bellefonte Field



Above is a view of the first hangars constructed on the Beaver farm field shortly after air mail service was instituted between New York and Cleveland. The building, of frame construction, was erected by Gehret and Lambert, well known Bellefonte contractors, and was burned to the ground on November 15, 1919.

The fire occurred while Charles Fromm, of Bellefonte, night watchman at the building, was on duty alone. He had put more coal on a stove in the office, located in one corner of the hangar, and had gone to another part of the building when he discovered the roof ablaze. By the time aid arrived the building

was doomed, and owing to the highly inflammable nature of its contents, nothing was saved.

The fire was a heavy blow to the air mail service, for the government lost 6 DeHaviland planes; a brand new Jenny which had never been in the air; two trucks; two motorcycles; tools, gasoline and other equipment.

Employees of the local field struggled along without hangar facilities for two years before steel hangars were erected. These buildings stood until several months ago, being removed only when the State Highway Department took over the site as part of their new garage location.

### WEBSTER SURVIVES CRASH

Jack Webster performed almost a miracle to save his life. Webster circled Phillipsburg for some time trying to find a hole in the fog so he could land. Finally he started for Bellefonte but failed to get enough altitude to clear the mountains and fell on the Rattlesnake Pike, north of Unionville. His plane was reduced to junk, but a passing motorist fortunately found the pilot a short time later and took him to a hospital, where he was under treatment for three months for a broken leg and other injuries.

Jimmy Cleveland, one of the old air mail veterans, crashed into the top of Mitty mountain, about one mile from the Bellefonte airport, and not far from the point where Ames met his death. Cleveland was instantly killed.

Jimmy Johnson, another veteran airman, got himself a first class Christmas present that year. He was flying at an altitude of 14,000 feet on Christmas eve when a wing fell off his plane, the resulting jar rendering the pilot unconscious. His plane fell 12,000 feet before the pilot regained consciousness, crawled out of the cockpit, and made a safe parachute jump.

On September 26, 1932 Paul Reeder

### Pilot Fred Robinson



Robinson was killed in October, 1920, near Millers-town when he failed to clear a cable and his plane plunged into the Susquehanna River.

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