Roosevelt Field’s Twenty-fourth Anniversary

K. S. Lindsay
Operations Manager

Aeronautical activities have continued in the region of what is now Roosevelt Field for twenty-four years. In the days of pioneering experimental flights, the natural suitability of the terrain attracted the keen-eyed “dare-devils” who had banded together to practise the art in which they were so interested. Lack of finances probably led them to select a territory requiring little or no preparation for their flights, yet the location was so wisely chosen that today it continues to be ideally suited to the purpose.

The site of the present Roosevelt Field was originally used as an emergency landing place by novice pilots operating from a field directly in back of what is now the Mineola Fair Grounds; in fact, in the surrounding area several fields were used for experimental flying. The Aeronautical Society had a shed in Mineola where members kept their machines in repair after frequent crack-ups. Hot air balloon ascents and parachute drops were frequent attractions.

Such famous pioneers as Lincoln Beachy, Earle Ovington, Glenn Curtiss and others demonstrated their planes at a field near the Nassau Boulevard section of Garden City. It was late in 1910 that the Aero Club of America leased an acre of ground at the edge of Hempstead Plains with the privilege of flying over all the other property controlled by the Garden City Company. One of the first American manufacturers of monoplanes, the Moisant brothers, and soon afterwards the Heinrich brothers, established shops and flying schools at what is now Roosevelt Field. The concrete and sheet iron hangars they used stand today, being the oldest group of hangars still in use.

The Mexican revolution of 1913 provided the Moisant company with the opportunity of producing “scouting” airplanes for the revolutionists. Most of the ships were flown down to Mexico by students who learned to fly them at the field. In those days flying was principally for exhibition purposes, and very little had been proved to the general public as to the value of aviation.

Some of the pioneers who later won distinction as pilots, inventors or manufacturers did much of their flying from this field. They included (besides those mentioned previously) Capt. Tom Baldwin, Charlie Hamilton, Clifford B. Harmon, Dr. H. Walden, James V. Martin, Leonard Bonney, Charlie Willard, the Heinrich brothers, George Page, John Guy Gilpatric, George Beatty, Augustus Post and a score of others. Many of the pioneers were financed and encouraged in their efforts by an energetic local resident, Pete McLaughlin, who resides in Mineola, and Joe Burt, “official photographer” of that period, is still specializing in aircraft photos there.

In 1914 the World War’s stimulus to European aviation was reflected as a new incentive to American pilots and builders. Bellanca, head of the well-known airplane manufacturing company bearing his name, learned to fly at this field about 1915 in a small home-made monoplane. Vincent Burnelli and John Carisi built an experimental military plane which was flight-tested at the field.

The New York National Guard established its aviation headquarters at the field in 1915. At first training was given on such types as the Burgess, Thomas, Gallaudet and Standard airplanes, which preceded the standardized Curtiss JN, used in great numbers for training purposes. Quentin Roosevelt, a son of President Roosevelt, was among the flying officers trained at this field. He met death in France in an aerial battle, and it was in his honor that Roosevelt Field was named. Incidentally, Theodore Roosevelt was the only President of the United States ever to fly in an airplane; this was in October, 1910, in a Wright plane piloted by Arch Hoxsey.

The United States Government took possession of the field in 1917. Under the name of Hazelhurst Field it was enlarged, many temporary wooden hangars and barracks were erected, and it became a most important flight training camp and the final point of concentration for all Army Air Service pilots before being sent overseas.

After the Armistice, military activities at the field were reduced and an era of commercial development began. The Air Service transferred its headquarters to Mitchel Field nearby, while the Curtiss company continued its test flying and demonstrations at the portion of the field which then became known as Curtiss Field. The Air Mail Service, which had its headquarters a few miles away at Belmont Park, transferred its equipment to Curtiss Field, which became the eastern terminus of the Transcontinental Air Mail Service.

Igor Sikorsky and a group of Russian engineers and mechanics established a shop at Roosevelt Field, where they constructed the first of his world-renowned American-built multi-motored airplanes.

Each succeeding year showed an ever-increasing public interest in flying as well as substantial improvements in the construction and operation of aircraft. As

(Continued on following page)
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By George W. Orr, President, Roosevelt Field, Inc.

When flying really began (and that was 1909, although the first flight was some years earlier), search was made for a location convenient to New York City and having good natural terrain and weather conditions. The high, dry and level expanse of the Hempstead Plains, near Garden City, was chosen as the ideal spot. It is here that the field that later was to be named “Roosevelt Field” was established. At this field, in the summer of 1909, Glenn H. Curtiss won the Scientific American trophy by flying twenty-five miles. That same year, Charles Willard made a cross-country flight of twelve miles, and Wilbur Wright circled the Statue of Liberty, starting from these plains.

In 1915 the New York National Guard organized an active aviation unit which won distinction soon after the United States entered the World War. This unit, the Aviation Detachment of the First Battalion, Signal Corps, was under the command of Lieutenant R. C. Bolling, who was killed in action during the war and after whom Bolling Field (Washington, D. C.) was named. At the National Guard flight training headquarters at the old “Hazellhurst Field” many prominent young men learned to fly; among them was Quentin Roosevelt, a modest, likable chap who worked as hard as any rookie on the field; he was among the first American-trained fliers to be killed in aerial battle. It was after Quentin Roosevelt that the field was given its present illustrious name.

After the war, a most noteworthy event at the field was the landing of the British military airship R-34 following her successful trans-Atlantic flight from East Fortune, England. This was at 9:40 a.m. on July 6, 1919. The 3,000-mile flight had taken 108 hours. Just before midnight three days later, the R-34 left for its return flight to England, where it landed safely after a flight of three days, three hours and three minutes.

On December 29-30, 1921, Eddie Stinson and Lloyd Bertaud in a Junkers-Larsen monoplane established an endurance record of 26 hours, 19 minutes, 35 seconds.

In 1927, the following trans-Atlantic flights took off from Roosevelt Field:

May 20-21. Charles Lindbergh, in a Ryan monoplane, Spirit of St. Louis, flew to Paris, winning the Orteig prize. Distance, 3,610 miles; time, 33 hours, 30 minutes.

June 4-5. Clarence Chamberlin, with Charles Levine as passenger, flew his Bellanca plane, Columbia, to Eisleben (near Berlin), Germany, a distance of 3,911 miles.

June 29-30. Commander Richard Byrd and his crew of three (Acosta, Balchen and Noville) flew to France, landing his Fokker trimotor, America, offshore at Ver-sur-Mer because of fog.

October 10-11. George Haldeman, pilot, and Ruth Elder took off in a Stinson monoplane, American Girl, on an attempted flight to Paris but were forced down by engine trouble 325 miles northeast of the Azores. The flight established an over-water distance record of 2,623 statute miles.

In 1929, several record-breaking flights started or terminated at Roosevelt Field:

February 4-5. Captain Frank Hawks and a mechanic flew non-stop from Los Angeles, setting a new west-east record of 18 hours, 21 minutes, 59 seconds.

March 27-28. Martin Jensen set a world solo duration record of 35 hours, 33 minutes, 20 seconds.

April 23-24. Elinor Smith established an endurance record for women of 26 hours, 21 minutes, 32 seconds.

June 27-29. Captain Hawks set a new east-to-west transcontinental speed record of 19 hours, 10 minutes, 32 seconds, flying to Los Angeles, Calif., and a new west-to-east transcontinental speed record of 17 hours, 38 minutes, 16 3/5 seconds, flying from Los Angeles to Roosevelt Field. Round trip, 36 hours, 46 minutes, 38 3/5 seconds.

In 1930 the following records were made:

March 10. Elinor Smith broke the women’s altitude record when she ascended to 27,418 feet in a Bellanca monoplane.

April 20. Colonel and Mrs. Charles Lindbergh left Glendale, Calif., at 8:26:20 a.m. and landed at 11:11:52 p.m. Total flying time, 14 hours, 23 minutes, 27 seconds. 172 miles per hour.

June 21. Colonel Roberto Fierro, Mexican flier, made a non-stop flight to Mexico City, covering the distance of 2,300 miles in 16 hours, 35 minutes.

June 23-26. Major Kingsford-Smith and crew flew from Ireland in the Southern Cross.

October 18. Laura Ingalls made the eastward crossing of the United States from Los Angeles in 25 hours, 35 minutes, flying time. A Moth biplane with a Cirrus engine was used.

November 9. Captain Hawks flew from Havana in 8 hours, 42 minutes, in his Texaco 15.

December. Alicia Patterson flew her Speedwing Laird from Cleveland in 2 hours, 41 minutes.

December. Ruth Nichols made a rec-
ord-breaking flight from Los Angeles, via Wichita, Kans., in 13 hours, 32 minutes.

Last year the following events took place at Roosevelt Field:

February. Captain Hawks established a new record of 55 minutes from Boston, his average speed being 207 m.p.h.

June. Bob Hall in a Gee Bee low-wing monoplane, flew from Springfield, Mass., making the trip in 33 minutes—at the rate of 236 miles an hour.

Wiley Post and Harold Gatty took off at 4:56 a.m. Tuesday, June 23, in the Winnie Mae, and returned on July 1, after circling the globe in eight days, 15 hours, 51 minutes.

July. Captain George Endres and Captain Alexander Magyar left in their Lockheed plane, Justice for Hungary, July 13, for Budapest, making the flight in about 32 hours, 45 minutes.

July 18. James G. Hall in his Crusader, a Lockheed Altair, flew to Havana in 8 hours, 47 minutes.

August. Captain Hawks flew to Fort Worth, Tex., in 7 hours, 57 minutes, setting another record.

August 31. James Hall made a record-breaking flight to New Orleans in a little more than seven hours.

September 13. Celebration of the first air mail flight, which took place on September 23, 1911, by reenactment of the flight.

October 27. Jimmy Doolittle took off for Ottawa in his Laird Super-Solution; from Ottawa he made a 2,500-mile flight to Mexico City, via Washington, D. C., between approximately 5 a.m. and 5 p.m.

December 14. Captain Hawks made a record flight from Chicago, covering the distance in 3 hours, 15 minutes.

History is not Roosevelt Field's only claim to distinction. Its glamor is romantic and its fame valuable, but aviation has passed its purely romantic stage; it is now a business. And in this day of efficiency and competition, leadership depends upon modern, up-to-date equipment. Roosevelt Field, as it appears today, is really a merger of three fields, containing in all some 500 acres of the Hempstead Plains. This combination includes the famous old Roosevelt Field, from which nearly all trans-Atlantic flights started (now known as Unit No. 1), the original Curtiss Field and a large tract of land lying between these long established airports, designated as Unit No. 2. While known under one name, all of these three fields are used by airplanes, and so to get a correct picture of Roosevelt, one must visualize three great all-way fields adjoining each other.

To insure all-weather conditions, and in addition to the fact that all the surface is high, dry and well sodded, a system of paved runways has been constructed, making possible a take-off into the wind in a choice of ten directions. This system of runways, taxiways and aprons called for some 1,800,000 square feet of paving. The subjugation of dust was accomplished at the same time.

While Roosevelt already had more buildings and space than any other airport, an extensive program of construction was undertaken and completed, giving the airport 131,000 square feet of modern concrete and steel hangars and a new hotel and extensive restaurant facilities. These improvements bring the buildings of the field to the unequalled amount of fifty aeronautical structures and hangar space of approximately 350,000 square feet.

There are miles of road, the main ones paved, an electric light and power system, miles of drainage and sewer piping, gas, water and similar facilities. Some thirty-two operators carry on their business at the field, their activities ranging from the sale of gas to the manufacturing of complete airplanes.

For night flying, a most complete system of lighting has been completed, including a four-million-candlepower Sperry floodlight, auxiliary floodlights which are illuminated automatically if the arc flood fails, double-ended revolving beacon with white and green lights of three-million candlepower and visible for more than seventy miles, a thirty-million-candlepower searchlight, ceiling finder and code beacon. The night field is outlined by border lights and all obstructions marked with red signals.

Fliers like the convenience of the field to the city, with over eighty trains a day from Manhattan and Brooklyn to Mineola, the field station, many taking only thirty-two to thirty-six minutes, or the excellent motor roads to all points. Mitchel, the large Army field, is immediately adjacent at the south. There are twelve eighteen-hole golf courses within a radius of three miles and many open fields in the vicinity. These advantages, together with the absence of surrounding swamps and congested buildings, increase the safety of flying operations and emergency landings.

The layman who goes to the airport for an airplane ride, flying instruction or just entertainment likes the background of romance and history that pervades the atmosphere, the chance to watch the activities of those who have made and are making that history. If flying, they like the record of safety through years of operation of the Roosevelt Flying Corp. Roosevelt Aviation School is well known for its long experience, its splendid equipment and personnel, its highest Government rating and its situation. Free parking spaces for visitors' automobiles are provided right out on the flying line. By means of a public address loudspeaker system, announcements are made and events are explained to the visitors.

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Layout and arrangement of Roosevelt Field, Mineola, Long Island, showing bituminous runways, hangars and other buildings
T HE Caldwell-Morgan medal for bravery is awarded Ike Vermilya and Jiggs Huffman for their courage in starting a new business in these hard times—to wit, the Vermilya-Huffman Flying Service, Cincinnati, Ohio. This Caldwell-Morgan hero medal, when, as and if minted, cast, moulded or otherwise caused to spring into being, is the idea of myself. And if the idea gets anywhere it will be paid for by J. Pierpont Morgan. If it doesn’t get anywhere you will know that he refused to pay for it. All I contribute is the idea.

And the idea is to turn out a solid platinum medal, the size of a soup plate or even larger, to be worn by the new business man, as a reward for and recognition of his bravery, audacity, temerity or whatever it was that caused him to embark in business during a slump, depression, panic or period of national innocuous desuetude. This medal differs from all others in that, if the recipient goes broke, he can pawn the medal and invest the proceeds in hot dogs and coffee. Among the assorted panaceas for the panic that I have noticed, this is the only one that offers even a ghost of a reward to anyone who will start something. It will remain a ghost of a reward, moreover, unless J. Pierpont Morgan seizes upon the idea and shells out the cost of the medals.

Now, Pierpont—may I be friendly and call you Pierpont?—I select you to back this medal idea because you are the only man outside of Andy Mellon who has any money left. I eliminate Andy from consideration because he’s of Scotch descent and his whole training has given him a grip on coin that only death will loosen. But you, Pierpont, have occasionally given things away. Only recently I heard you give away some advice over the radio. You advised the poor to help the poor, and not bother you, if I recall it correctly. And you are a patron of the arts. Well, what art is more noble than the art of starting a new business in times like these? Who knows? These boys may make enough money to buy some of those defunct foreign government bonds you sold in 1929. Anyhow, they deserve all the encouragement philanthropists like you and me can give them. While you call up Tiffany and have the medal made, I’ll give you a few brief notes about these lads.

Wright Vermilya, Jr., learned to fly in France and on his return bought a plane and barnstormed. He served in the Army Air Corps Reserve at Cincinnati and in the Arkansas National Guard squadron at Little Rock, where he became a flying instructor. He was test pilot and flying engineer for the Commandaire Company when he hit upon the idea of riding on instead of in the fuselage of a Commandaire to demonstrate the plane’s stability. This stunt got him into the movies, though not in Hollywood. He was found to be long on courage but short on sex appeal. In 1929 he returned to Cincinnati where he has been engaged in flying for several Cincinnati plane owners.

Stanley C. Huffman entered aviation with Billy Brock at Springfield, Ohio. They built gliders together at the rate of one glider to one crack-up. Then Jiggs learned that if he became a cadet the government would pay for the crack-ups, so he learned to fly at Carlstrom, Brooks and Kelly fields. He graduated from the Army’s technical school at McCook Field, barnstormed for a firecracker company, demonstrating fireworks on an old Standard at night, and in 1926 joined John Paul Riddle at Cincinnati and helped build the Embry-Riddle Company. He flew the first air mail from Cincinnati to Chicago. When the company became the Embry-Riddle Division of American Airways, Jiggs Huffman was operations manager, a position he held until he resigned to enter the partnership with Vermilya.

The Vermilya-Huffman Flying Service maintain storage and sales service at Lunken Airport and will act as consultants and aviation advisors for private plane purchasers and for corporations using planes in business. They will not do general instruction work, but those buying planes through the company will be taught to fly. They also maintain an air taxi service, a club room at the hangar and transportation downtown for visiting pilots. That last feature alone should win them the Caldwell-Morgan medal, when, as and if issued. But that, of course, is up to my partner, Pierpont.

T HE indefatigable Robert Johnson, Manager of Publicity of the Boeing Airplane Company, and the tireless Harold Crary, Manager of Advertising and News Service of United Air Lines, for whom no labor is too severe, even unto reading my remarks each month, both take pen in hand to inform me that another correction is due from these parts. You may recall that some months ago I incalculably wondered, in print, if I hadn’t carried the first contract air mail from the United States to a foreign country. Mr. Inglis Uppercu set my wonderment at rest forever by stating in stentorian tones that his own Aeromarine Company held that honor. I published the correction. And now these two delvers into the past inform me that Mr. Uppercu also is out of order, for the first contract air mail service in the United States was begun in August, 1920, and that the late Edward Hubbard was flying mail for the post office in a Boeing seaplane, somewhat prior to the official awarding of the U. S. Postal contract.

Bob Johnson writes: “I have before me an old clipping from the Seattle Times which describes what they choose to call the first international mail trip by airplane on this continent, namely the carrying of mail by plane from Vancouver, (Continued on following page)
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DEPENDABILITY SIMPLICITY ACCESSIBILITY
Modern school hangar at Roosevelt Field

(Continued from preceding page)

the need for additional space to provide for this activity became apparent, three fields were merged into the single unit which is now Roosevelt Field. This combination includes what is known as Old Roosevelt Field (Field No. 1), the original Hazelhurst or Curtiss Field (Field No. 2) and a long strip of land which formerly separated these two fields. In all, the property now consists of some five hundred acres of the Jamaica Plains. A description of the Field and mention of some of the many historical flights made from it were presented in the June issue of Aero Digest. Visitors often ask field attendants to point out the runways where Lindbergh, Byrd, Chamberlin and others took off on their record-breaking flights of 1927. Several mechanics who worked on the ships of these famous aviators are connected with companies now at the field.

Roosevelt Field is conveniently reached from New York City by the Long Island Railroad, which operates more than eighty trains to Mineola every day. The train time by express is only thirty-two minutes between Pennsylvania Station and Mineola, the station nearest the field. Free bus service is provided between Mineola and the field. Good roadways and a privately owned motor parkway make the field easily accessible by automobile. The facilities are more extensive than at any other American airport; they include fifty buildings, 350,000 square feet of hangar space, nearly one-third of which is in new concrete and steel hangars; modern night lighting and 1,800,000 square feet of paved runway, aprons, etc. There are twice as many airplanes at Roosevelt Field as at any other metropolitan airport. The divisional office for District No. 1, Aeronautics Branch of the Department of Commerce, is located there. Besides the Roosevelt Aviation School and the Roosevelt Flying Corp., which furnishes airplane taxi service, the following agencies, supply houses, manufacturers and service depots, etc., are located at Roosevelt Field:


As announced in Aero Digest last month, an aviation museum is being established at the field. This historical collection is being assembled in one of the large hangars. At the present time the collection consists of a number of early American and foreign aviation engines and several complete airplanes built before the War. In the collection is a complete "Red Devil" pusher built by Capt. Tom Baldwin. Reports are being received of other equipment of this character which is planned to obtain for the museum, indicating that one of the most complete and unique exhibits will soon be open to the public.

Flying activities continue the year round, and no admission charge is made to the visiting public. Adequate parking space is provided for automobiles from which visitors can see the field without leaving their cars. A modern hotel and restaurant are provided, supplying city accommodations to visiting pilots, students and the general public.

The following officials comprise the executive personnel of Roosevelt Field: Seth Low, Chairman of the Board of Directors; Graham B. Grosvenor, Chairman of the Executive Committee; George W. Orr, President; W. D. Guthrie, Treasurer; A. C. Kennedy, Secretary; K. S. Lindsay, Operations Manager; R. J. Barbin, Assistant Operations Manager; A. W. Price, Purchasing Agent; L. Flewellin, Chief Instructor; William C. Erb, Sales Manager; L. F. Brown, Field Superintendent.