



From
Balloons

To
Ballistics



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Cover Photo: The Stapleton control tower is one of the few remaining structures that denote the location of the airport which served Denver from 1929 to 1995. It is now being used by the FlyteCo Brewing Company which is in the process of creating an exciting venue for the residents of the housing developments that have sprouted up in the area. Its second commercial venue, FlyteCo opened at the tower location in the summer of 2022. The CAHS summer meeting was held there last August and our members were able to climb to the top level of the tower which provides an amazing panorama of the Denver/Aurora area. FlyteCo has been highlighting one of our Hall of Fame laureates in each monthly newsletter. (Photo: Steve Kelly)

Your article in Balloons to Ballistics

The Colorado Aviation Historical Society is soliciting articles that relate to Colorado and aviation from interested contributors. We're looking for submissions that speak to any subject that you would like to see in print (i.e. aeronautical memorabilia, airports, aviators, aviation businesses, astronauts, etc.). If you have something to offer please forward it at your earliest convenience.

Articles should be submitted in a Times New Roman (12 font) format, and have an unjustified right edge. Please do not insert photos into the article, but add them each as an additional jpg. attachment and include a caption for each.

Submit your article(s) or questions to:
aviator_b@msn.com

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Flown West

Don O Neary

1935- 2024



Hall of Fame laureate, Don O. Neary, passed away on January 12, 2024 in Centennial, Colorado.

Don was born on December 27, 1932. He attended the University of Colorado where he played football and was enrolled in Air Force ROTC.

After graduation, Neary reported to Lackland Air Force Base in June 1956, then was assigned to Stallings Air Base at Kinston, North Carolina for pilot training.

Don Neary was one of the pilots who served overseas when the Colorado Air National Guard 120th Tactical Fighter Squadron was deployed to Phan Rang Air Base in Vietnam in 1968. Col. Neary flew 239 combat missions in Vietnam with the Colorado Air National Guard in the F-100 Super Sabre. Don also flew the A-7 Corsair II.

Neary received the Air Force Association's Aerospace Safety Award while Safety Officer for the 140th Tactical Fighter Wing at Buckley Air National Guard base.

Don served as the chair the Colorado Air National Guard's Air Heritage Committee, which seeks to preserve the extensive history of the Air National Guard in Colorado. He was instrumental in establishing the Air Heritage Room at Wings over the Rockies Air & Space Museum which honors the history of the Colorado Air National Guard.

Don Neary was inducted into the Colorado Aviation Hall of Fame in 2011.

Mystery Quiz Summer Journal 2023

The challenge for the last issue was to identify this unique, ahead-of-its-time, Colorado designed aircraft.



Emigh A-2 "Trojan" (NC8301H, s.n) on display (3/12/2012) at the Border Air Museum, Douglas Municipal Airport, Douglas, Arizona (Photo by Lt. Col. Dr. Marc Matthews, M.D., USAF (retired))

The aircraft is the Emigh Trojan A-2, of which 58 were built between 1946 and 1950 by the Emigh Trojan Aircraft Company of Douglas, Arizona. The prototype of this aircraft, the Emigh Rocket, was designed, built and test flown in Denver, Colorado by Harold "Pop" Emigh (CAHoF 1976) in 1940. Unique in its simple design and construction, much of the aircraft's major components – such as ailerons, stabilizers, elevators and rudder – are interchangeable. It was also among the earliest aircraft to incorporate a tricycle landing gear configuration. Powered by a Continental A-90 engine, this zippy little two-place cruised at a respectable 115 mph. It is believed that less than ten of these aircraft still exist today.

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AVAR Summer Trek

Wichita State Crash Site

Brian Richardson

On the morning of Friday, October 2, 1970, two chartered Martin 404 transport planes alighted at Stapleton International Airport for fuel, enroute to Logan, Utah. These aircraft were carrying the Wichita State University football team, support staff, and several prominent members of its booster club for a Saturday game against Utah State University. Each aircraft took on a maximum load of fuel to ensure safe flying time over the remaining flight.



The Martin 404 was a twin-engine 40 passenger aircraft designed in the early 1950's as a replacement for the DC-3. Several local service airlines used this aircraft. (Photo: Steve Kelly)

After departure from Stapleton Airport the two aircraft – N464M and N470M – headed for their destination following entirely different routes. N470M, as originally planned and briefed, elected to fly via Airway Victor 4 to Laramie, Wyoming, and then on to Logan by way of Rock Springs, Wyoming. This route would provide an initial flight path parallel to the mountain ranges, allowing ample time for the aircraft to reach a safe enroute altitude prior to turning westward over the mountains.¹ However, the crew of N464M decided to take a more direct, scenic route over the Colorado Rockies in order to impress the passengers. While N470M arrived safely and on-schedule in Logan, most of the passengers and crew of N464M were not as fortunate.

Loosely tracking above U.S. Highway 6 westbound out of Denver, which basically runs concurrent with Interstate Highway 70, N470M headed up Clear Creek Canyon, entering in the vicinity of Idaho Springs, cruising just barely above the surrounding peaks. By the time the aircraft reached the Georgetown area, multiple witnesses began to take notice that this airplane seemed out-of-place and rather low. Indeed, some hikers situated throughout the surrounding terrain stated that they were “looking down upon it.”

Approaching Dry Gulch, just 10 miles east of the Continental Divide, at an altitude of about 10,000 feet mean sea level (MSL), passengers began to notice that trees were passing just outside their window and that the mountainsides were well above, not below, as they expected.

Alarmed by this, survivor Rick Stephens, a 22-year-old offensive lineman, entered the cockpit (yes, for you non-boomers... passengers could do that back then; they could also smoke and enjoy a three-course meal while in-flight) to find Captain Danny Crocker and Copilot Ron Skipper, frantically studying maps and searching for an alternative to their predicament. In a final, desperate act, Crocker executed a drastic banking maneuver north in an attempt to reverse course in this box canyon. Unable to overcome the extremes of density altitude and an overloaded weight condition in his aircraft, N470M impacted terrain on the south side of Mount Trelease, at 10,800 feet, about 1,500 feet short of the peak, with tragic results. Two crew members and 28 passengers were fatally injured, however, nine passengers and one crew member survived. These survivors provided crucial evidence during the accident investigation.

Captain Crocker proved to be a questionable pilot. Copilot Skipper, later learned to be the actual owner of the company employing Crocker, but unqualified to serve as a command-pilot on that particular aircraft, was ultimately responsible for this accident.

This past summer **AvAr** made two different ascents to the crash site. The first trek was on July 22nd, conducted by team members Ron Miller, Dave Kempa and Brian Richardson. The second hike was on August 5th, with team members Caleb Bowman, Ron Miller, David Seniw, Ernie LeRoy, Larry Liebrecht, and Brian Richardson. Three guests, Bill Marvel, Henrik Laird, and Quinn Matteson rounded out the party.

(continued next page)

(Wichita State Crash from page 4)

The first half of this 1.7-mile journey was made on foot up a graded dirt road, which is easy compared to the last stretch, which is a very steep hike at a 28-degree incline through the forest. However, the trip is well worth it since this is one of only a few relatively intact crash sites in Colorado. While both engines were removed during the original investigation, most all of the airplane still rests at this site and the debris field is considerable.



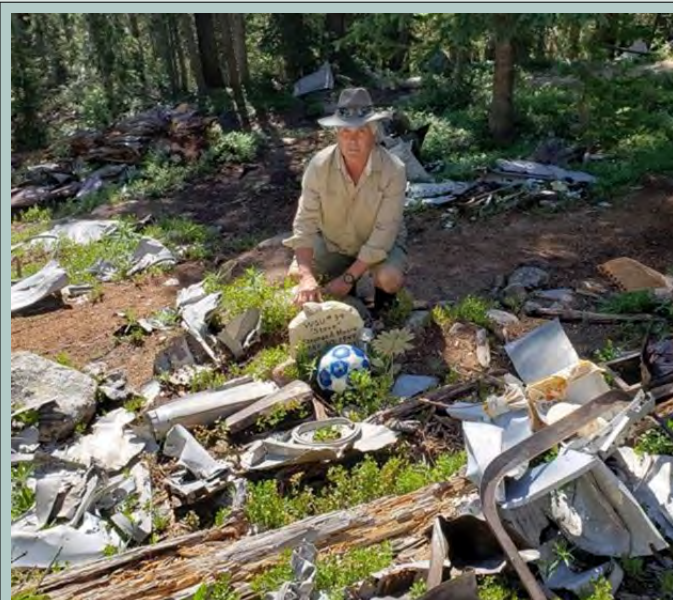
Memorial for John Taylor, who survived the crash but later succumbed to his injuries. (Courtesy Dave Kempa)

Perhaps more overwhelming than the impressive wreckage is the almost immediate realization that this is a memorial park, festooned throughout with small, stirring shrines to many of the victims – a very humbling effect, indeed! Unlike almost every other site that AvAr has visited, this one shows no obvious signs of vandalism.



Note the molten aluminum incorporated into the rocks at the base of this memorial (Courtesy Dave Kempa)

Coincidentally, on our August 5th expedition there was a small party that arrived just ahead of the AvAr team. Among these visitors was Dr. Richard Muma, the current President of Wichita State University, who had come to pay his respects. CAHS Board Member and internationally recognized aviation archaeologist, Col. Ernie LeRoy (USAF Ret.), approached this group and offered an interpretation of the debris field.



CAHS Board Member and internationally recognized aviation archaeologist, Col. Ernie LeRoy (USAF Ret.), examines wreckage at the crash site (Courtesy Brian Richardson)

“Aviation in itself is not inherently dangerous. But to an even greater degree than the sea, it is terribly unforgiving of any carelessness, incapacity or neglect.”

-RAF Group Captain A.G. Lamplugh

¹Excerpt from FAA Aviation Safety Inspector (Ret.) Randy Holder’s notes, provided by Ron Miller of <http://Coloradowreckchasing.com>

Related: Several good documentaries have been produced over the years that can be viewed on Youtube.

If you are interested in visiting this or any of the other many historic (50+ years) crash sites around Colorado, please contact AvAr at: Contact Us - Colorado Aviation Historical Society (coahs.org)

53rd Annual Hall of Fame Banquet

Major General John L. Barry, USAF (Ret), Larry A. Ulrich, and Col. W. Dillard "Pic" Walker (posthumous) were installed as the newest laureates of the Colorado Aviation Hall of Fame at the annual ceremony on October 7th. Held at the Lakewood Country Club, the banquet was attended by 100 guests, including many family members and past Hall of Fame laureates.



CAHS President Keith Shaddox and 2023 laureate Major Gen John L. Barry (Photo: Dave Kempa)



Philip Brown is presented the Wright Brothers 50 Year Master Pilot Award by Dale Ogden FAA Flight Standards District Office Manager (Photo: Dave Kempa)



Larry Ulrich with 2021 Laureate Robert Olislagers (Photo: Dave Kempa)



Billy Walker and Kurt Garbin accept the laureate plaque for W. Dillard "Pic" Walker (Photo: Dave Kempa)

CAHS would like to express our thanks to Anna Bajinski and the staff at Lakewood Country Club, Dave Kempa, Timothy McGowen, Jim Huffman, and the Cadets of the CAP Highlander Composite Squadron.

Notes From the Field

"GHOST PLANE" LOST IN STATE; 3 OF CREW SAFE

By Brian Richardson

That's how the headlines of the Rocky Mountain News read on Monday morning, April 12, 1948. The actual story was printed on page five.

The aircraft, a Beechcraft twin-engine C-45 transport plane was on a routine cross-country training flight from Tinker Field, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma to Lowry Field Denver, Colorado for refueling, then on to its final destination of Hill Air Force Base in Ogden, Utah.

Prior to reaching Lowry Field, the three airmen aboard parachuted and landed safely in the snow-covered fields near the farm of W.J. Sahm Jr. From there, they had been taken to the Lowry Field Officer's club for a warm meal and, likely a drink or two to celebrate their survival.

Twelve hours later, however, the plane still hadn't been found.

For the three airmen, the flight heading west toward their home base had been without problem for the first few hours on that Sunday. Just 10 minutes after receiving a favorable weather report from the tower at Peterson Field in Colorado Springs they encountered thick snow and icing conditions and realized they were in trouble.

The pilot, Capt. Wilbur J. Schindler, said they were within 18-20 miles of Lowry Field when the aircraft began losing altitude despite the fact that the deicers were turned on. He radioed Lowry Field that he was turning south and was going to order his crew to abandon ship. Capt. Schindler told authorities that at the time he left the cockpit, the aircraft was on autopilot and was headed due south. He was unable to determine how much fuel remained on board. He also said the crew had

only a 500-to-1,000-foot fall before reaching the ground. His last report to Lowry tower was at 11:41 am.

The headlines in the news the next day proclaimed "SEARCHERS UNABLE TO FIND PLANE LOST NEAR DENVER". The "ghost" plane remained lost overnight when eight search aircraft returned after searching 1,000 sq. miles south of where the men were found after parachuting from their stricken aircraft. Lowry Field officers were quoted as stating the transport plane was carrying enough fuel to continue flying from 25 minutes to an hour.



The C-45 was the military version of the popular Beech 18 model. (Photo: USAF Museum)

On Tuesday, April 14th the Denver Post headline announced, "PLANE HUNTING PHANTOM SHIP CRASH-LANDS", after two men escaped injury when their Vultee L-5 "Sentinel" observation plane crash-landed near Castle Rock. They had been a part of the continuing search effort for the missing C-45 transport plane. Seven other planes crisscrossed a 60-mile-wide area between Denver and Colorado Springs, without spotting the missing "ghost" ship. The news story that day reported results of the search.

By that Friday the story was relegated to the back pages, simply stating the search for the "ghost" plane continues.

Finally, the story is back in the news on Friday, April 23rd. "PILOTLESS PLANE FOOLS AIR FORCE BY HITTING PEAK NEAR NEDERLAND". The plane, missing since April 11, had been found by a private pilot high on a mountain peak near the Continental Divide.

(continued next page)

(Notes From the field “Ghost Plane” Continued)



Rocky Mountain News headline from April 12, 1948
(Photo: Larry Carpenter)

The authorities had withheld announcing the find until positive identification could be made by comparing serial numbers of the found plane to that of the missing “ghost” plane.

The reader is left to speculate how the aircraft, wings laden with ice, supposedly heading on auto-pilot due south towards Castle Rock, at a dangerously low altitude (6,000 MSL), could have changed to a northwesterly direction, then climbed in altitude until it finally met with rising terrain at just under 11,000 feet MSL, about seven miles due west of Nederland and roughly 60 miles from where the crew had left the ship. According to the military accident report photos, the unmanned aircraft seems to have struck the ground in a level flight attitude, as if it were under control, shearing off a few trees on the sparsely forested mountainside from where the Divide can be seen approximately three miles to the west. Pictures of the engines [today] indicate that they were not producing power at the time of impact, which leads investigators to the conclusion that the aircraft had finally exhausted all of its usable fuel when it came down.

On Saturday, July 7, 2001, **AvAr** team member Larry Carpenter ascended Mount Woodland to search for the wreckage. He managed to locate and survey the crash site, providing the color photographs included with this article.

A visitor to this remote crash site today will find that most of the wreckage has been removed, undoubtedly scavenged by aluminum scrappers back in the seventies. The two Pratt and Whitney Wasp Jr. engines remain on site as do most of the heavy steel components (landing gear, engine mounts, etc.). It is evident that the souvenir hunters have been busy over the years removing some engine cylinders and the propeller blades from their hubs.



The engines, appearing not that much the worse for wear, have obviously been vandalized over the years.
(Photo: Larry Carpenter)

The mystery of the “Ghost” plane remains as popular folklore to this day. It has been speculated that the odds of this aircraft doing what it did are astronomical. Some have even said that it was physically impossible. On a more ethereal note... one contributor suggested that the airplane was guarded by the spirit of a former pilot who took control and shepherded the aircraft to a semi-safe landing. I leave it to you, the reader... Could it be that a “ghost” actually took control after the crew bailed out and rode the aircraft gently in?

*Editor’s Note: Material for this article was taken from the field report that Colorado **AvAr** member Larry Carpenter submitted on 11 March 2014. His actual expedition to the crash site occurred on 7 July 2001.*

If you are interested in visiting this or any of the other many historic (50+ years) crash sites around Colorado, please contact **AvAr** at: Contact Us - Colorado Aviation Historical Society (coahs.org)

Mystery Quiz Winter 2024

In each issue of the Journal we will present a photograph from the Society archives and challenge you, the reader, to provide information about the subject. Anyone who responds with the correct answer will be mentioned in the following issue, and the first person to answer will win a CAHS commemorative challenge coin. Send your response to aviator_b@msn.com at your earliest convenience to ensure your submittal is included in the next Journal. Please make sure to include a mailing address where you'd like to receive the coin.

The challenge for this issue: *Identify the make and model of this unique, 1930's aircraft, which was ahead-of-its-time.*



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