

international FLEET CLUB NEWSLETTER



ON THE COVER

Early New York State Police aviation unit: (L to R) Vince Cooper, Bill Stevenson, Bud Doran, Tremaine Hughes, Harry Sanderson, Joe Fitzpatrick, and John Wheeler with Fleet Model 2 trainer.

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FROM THE EDITOR

Lately British archeologists have been fascinated with the dream of finding buried WW2 Spitfires in Burma or actually discovering the bones of King Richard III in Leicester, under a parking lot. Back here on our own soil, I've been digging up a long forgotten Fleet story or, as Major Robin H. Benziger, historian for the NY State Police, puts it "stirring up some ghosts."

In the '20s and '30s, the Fleet factory was on Elmwood Avenue in Buffalo, NY and this was the birthplace of the models 1, 2, 7, 8 and 9. Shortly thereafter, Rueben Fleet decided to move Consolidated Aircraft to San Diego to escape the upstate NY weather. His VP Larry Bell stayed behind to start Bell Aircraft at the old facilities. Elmwood Ave. runs through the suburb of Kenmore and it was the center of my family's universe. In the '40s, my Mom and Dad met at Bell while building the P-39. For me, growing up in the post-war '50s, Elmwood meant bike shops, candy stores, and hobby shops that sold tubes of Ambroid. I remember the sidewalks on Elmwood Avenue as wide, open and sunny, most likely because Dutch elm disease had by then taken its toll on the mighty American elm.

Another almost forgotten American breed that rolled out of the Consolidated factory on Elmwood Avenue is the rare Fleet Model 8 Courier. In this issue we will share the story of the birth and death of the fledgling NY State Aviation unit, the men involved and their Model 8 Courier.

Happy Summer Flying!



COVER STORY

“When Death Rode on the Wings of a State Troopers’ Plane”

Years ago, when I first started my Fleet restoration project, I met a retired State Trooper at the local airport who showed me a photo of several helmeted, goggled, jodphured troopers gathered around a Fleet Model 2. Recently, I remembered this image and set out to learn more about it. I wrote to the New York State Police (NYSP) and was referred to officer-historian Major Robin H. Benziger; with her help I pieced together the following story.

In January 1932, Lt. Tremaine Hughes of the NYSP, a pilot, was assigned to transport fellow officer Theophilus Gaines of the Teletype Bureau in Albany to Batavia to repair equipment. Ironically, part of their mission was to set up a state-wide advance weather reporting system. Hughes dropped his passenger and continued on to Buffalo, undoubtedly to have some maintenance done on the brand new Model 8 at the factory. He returned to pick him up and left



Control Stick from the Troop D Airplane flown by Liuet. Hughes



for the 120-mile return trip at 4:00 PM with a 1200 foot ceiling and a strong tail wind increasing their speed. As Hughes neared his home field in Oneida, he began to run out of daylight and a dense fog set in. Some locals residents reported hearing the plane pass low overhead; one, driving a truck full of apples, stopped to watch the plane, lights on, heading over a small hill. The Fleet crashed into the lone elm tree on the 1200- foot hill. The impact sheared off the wings, and the tree pierced the fuselage. Both officers were killed in the crash. Hughes remained belted while Gaines was thrown clear. The ensuing fire ignited the emergency flares carried aboard for night landings and lit up the sky.

The Syracuse (NY) Journal, reported the crash on January 16, 1932: “WHEN DEATH RODE ON WINGS OF STATE TROOPERS’ PLANE”

Hughes and Gaines were not garden-variety police officers. Hughes was one of the early “rough riders,” a group of trick riders that entertained at county fairs, horse shows and the New York State Fair, showing off their horsemanship and courage. His career was “larger than life.” He enlisted in the State Police in 1918, a year after it had been formed, and rose quickly through the ranks. In 1929, he was instrumental in quelling the infamous Auburn Prison riot. Around

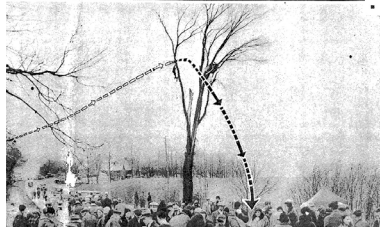
“Lieut. Hughes & Gaines Victims of Dense Fog; Some Think Forced Landing Was Being Attempted”

that time, he and a few friends bought an airplane, and Hughes became a skilled pilot. Hughes pretty much created New York State’s first aviation detail; he was one of the colorful, adventurous and fearless pioneers of the early years of aviation. He saw the value of using aviation in meteorology and police work and sold state officials on the idea. He taught most of the officers to fly himself and was placed in charge of the NYSP’s only aircraft – the Fleet Model 8 – in July 1931. Well-known in aviation circles around the state, his duties included aircraft inspection and a week before the crash had grounded several un-airworthy aircraft at Roosevelt Field.

TROOPER-FLIERS PROBE

Plane Hits Auto Near Cornin

DEATH RODE ON WINGS OF STATE TROOPERS' PLANE



LIEUT. HUGHES
 AND GAINES
 WERE
 VICTIMS OF
 CRASH

Some Think Forced Landing Was Being Attempted
 Planes Crashed
 Particular topography of district, combined with which large heavy area, led to the Friday plane crash which killed lives of Lieut. Trooper Hughes, 36, of Troop D, C.



Like all early pilots who came out of the cavalry, LT Hughes carried on the practice of mounting and dismounting on the left.



Hughes' funeral, which included his favorite mount Gypsy and pallbearers from the aviation unit, was witnessed by a crowd of 3,000, including a Senator, Griswold Webb, who headed the legislative committee on aviation and gave the eulogy. A lone plane flew overhead.

Gaines, a native of Colorado, was a veteran of the anti-bootlegging rum trail patrols in the northern part of NY and in 1928 was wounded in the chin and shoulder by an armed suspect in a fleeing car as he chased it. He served five months in the US Flying Corps before joining the NYSP. His body was returned to his family in Three Forks, Montana, for burial.

But the story doesn't end there. The wreckage of the Fleet was brought to Troop headquarters in Oneida. A man stopped and wanted to buy it for scrap metal, but the Troop Commander sent him away and ordered the wreckage, like a faithful old horse, buried behind the HQ building. Not unlike poor King Richard III, rumor has it the Fleet 8 is unglamorously interred beneath a parking lot, possibly belonging to

one of the many present-day fast food joints. Before the detail buried the plane though, Trooper Wheeler, who was also a pilot, took the control stick from the wreckage; it is now on display at the new HQ building across the street, the single physical reminder of this historic event. See photo below.

Until recently, we knew the of existence of only two Fleet model 8s - NC 70CJ flying around Warrensburg, Missouri and NC 49V hanging in the New York State Museum in Albany. We now know (approximately) where a third one sleeps. It may lay forgotten below a Taco Bell and certainly not wrapped in cosmoline, like a mythic, Burma-buried Spitfire, but NC68V's burial seems more respectful than that of some unwanted, anonymous piece of war surplus.

Many thanks to the great folks who helped put the pieces of this story together, including: Investigator John D. Fallon, New York State Police, Troop D - Major Crimes, Oneida, NY; T/Sgt Kathy Humphries, New York State Police Aviation Unit, Albany, NY; and especially Major R.H. Benziger, Director of Training, New York State Police, Albany, NY.

TECH TALK

Rightly Rigging Your Landing Wires.

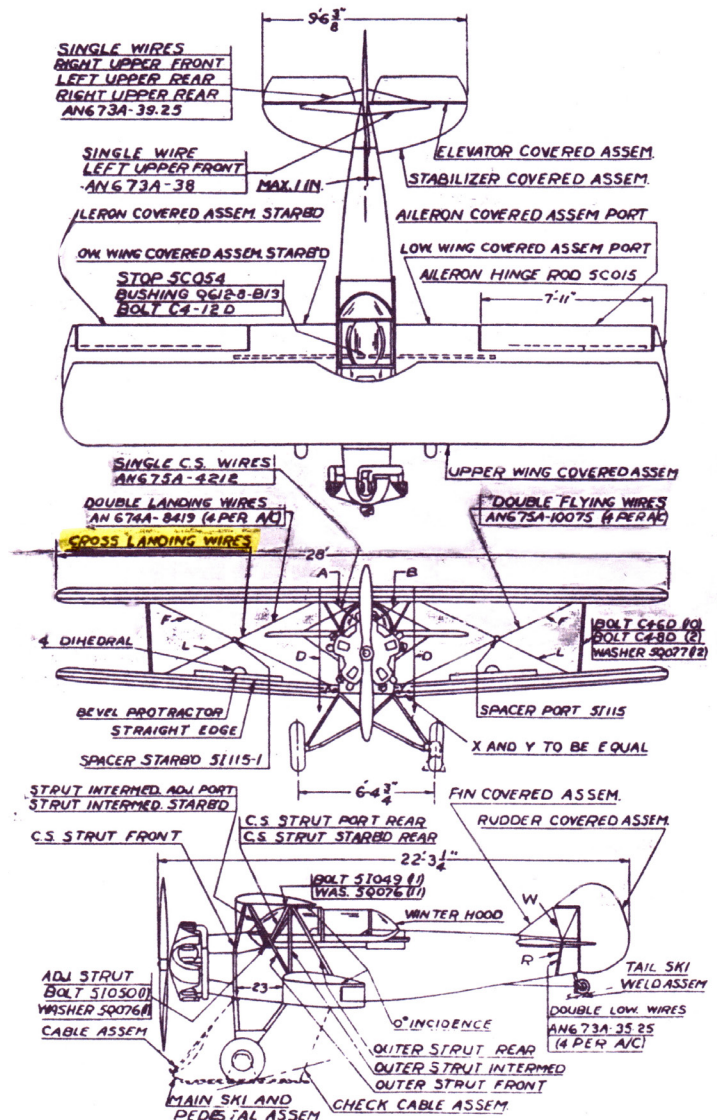
Here's one to cross off your next maintenance list. If you're flying 16B wings with two landing wires, be sure to rig them correctly. As you may know, early Fleets had a single landing wire that passed between the two flying wires. The RCAF contract for the Model 16 called for two landing wires and this retrofit posed a problem for Fleet engineers.

Changing the upper and lower fittings from one hole to two was easy enough, but they encountered a challenge when it came to the intersection of the four wires. Since all 8 flying and landing wire fittings are in the same geometric plane, the basic law of physics that says two things can't occupy the same space at the same time, came into play.

Their solution was to simply cross the two landing wires as they pass through the flying wires (see rigging diagram, fig. 1). This counter intuitive but important rigging detail has been relegated to the dustbin of history and is often overlooked. The assumption that wires must run parallel to each other has led to various incorrect rigging solutions. All wires should be dead straight in tension and not forced to curve around each other with an improvised javelin. The correctly-crossed wires are simply wrapped with several layers of friction tape. The model 16 manual calls for either phenolic spacers or a rubber bullet to separate the landing and flying wires from each other.

You can clearly see the crossed landing wires starting at 0:39, here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lesBr8hGB0c>

There, you've just crossed over to the parallel universe of 1939!



MEMBERS WRITE

Stories from our members.

STAN SWEIKAR

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Stan Sweikar sent us a great piece on "The Life and Times of Fleet NC 431K," which he'd be happy to share with members. In short, NC431K was born during the summer of 1929 in Buffalo, New York as a Consolidated Aircraft Company Model 2 Fleet, Serial Number 154. Stan is its 20th owner (after numerous flying clubs and individual owners, including Buck Hilbert and Richard Bach who featured it in his aviation novel "Illusions"). Members have followed Stan's ups and downs with this craft. He still finds it a delight to fly and thinks of this little biplane as a Cub with two wings.

BLAKE REID

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Vintage Wings of Canada had its first Finch flight of the year May 1! Plans for the summer include a campaign to "inspire the next generation of Canada's leaders;" they'll be offering 550 rides to air cadets



Earl with Fleet Finch 4462 at Standfield International Airport, Halifax NS. Blake had the honor of giving this WW 2 Finch pilot a

across the country in July and August.

<http://vintagewingsofcanada.blogspot.ca/2013/05/finally-our-finchs-first-flight.html>

BRANDON ECKHOFF

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A new member of the Fleet community, Brandon is an A&P student during the day and works for a private war bird collector, Mike George, in the evening, restoring a rare Fleet Model 9. Have fun, fellas!

MICK ZADRA

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Fleet 16B, S/N 529 N9753L, originally restored by Murray Randall in Massachusetts, changed hands and moved to Texas and has now made its way to the Czech Republic and is being restored by Mick Zadra. His 30 years' experience in aviation will be useful for this latest restoration.

SID LLOYD

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It's been many years since we owned a Fleet. Would anyone like to take over management of Fleetnet, (a discussion group found at fleetnet@yahoo.com). Not much to it: just approve new members.

MIKE VANCE

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My Fleet Model 1 with a Warner engine has been flying now for 18 years with no serious problems. It is such a joy to fly. I would like to touch base with other Fleet owners in the Club that are powered by Warners, so we could share our experiences and help each other out with engine parts and so on.



Mike Vance in his Fleet Model 1



Stan Sweikar's Model 2 at the Midwest Antique Airplane Club "GrassRoots" Fly-In at Brodhead, WI. Photo by Gilles Auliard.



Brandon Eckhoff is working with Mike George to restore this Fleet Model 9.

FOR SALE

Brian Coughlin has a Fleet Model 1 1929 for sale. It has only 45 hours since major on its 125 Warner overhauled by Walt Schiebe. It was originally owned by the US Navy and used in their blimp program in the early 1930s. It comes with lots of documentation, some extra parts and an extra set of wheels and tires. Price \$65,000 or he would take a B-5 Kinner and/or an 80 LeRhone in partial trade. Location Cazenovia, NY. Contact Brian at 315 655-5997 or coughlinconstruction@yahoo.com.

RESOURCES

The Resources section – a listing of professionals and providers of Fleet expertise and parts – has remained fairly stable for many years. In order to have space for other items of interest, it will not be printed with every Newsletter. Instead, we will post and update the Resources section on our website, and will print it occasionally when space allows and/or substantial changes are needed. If you need a printed list, contact the Editor. Vendors, please review your listing, and send any corrections or editions to the editor at : fleetclub@mac.com

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With the increasing cost of paper and postage, and concerns about the environment, we want to make sure that we're not wasting resources. If you would prefer NOT to receive the paper version of the newsletter by US Post Office mail, and would prefer to read it on the website and view photos in living color, please let us know ASAP via e-mail: fleetclub@mac.com.

PHOTOS FOR THE NEWSLETTER

We love including your photographs in the newsletter and on the website. If at all possible, digital photographs are ideal. We can also scan good quality photographic prints and will return them if you indicate that's your preference. Generally, photocopies of photographs don't reproduce well enough to include.

HOW TO READ YOUR MAILING LABEL

There are 5 pieces of information on the first line, each separated by a slash [/]:

Model # / Serial # / Registration # / Status of Aircraft / year of your last donation to the newsletter. If there

is a question mark [?] instead of a year, we have no donation record. If you see two slashes together, that data is missing and we would like to hear from you about it. No data between the slashes means there is no record of you owning an aircraft. Also note regardless of how many aircraft you own, there is only space on the label to note one.

MAKING DONATIONS

There are no dues required for Fleet Club membership. Donations of any size are welcome and most appreciated, however, to support the production and mailing of the newsletter and website. Please make checks payable to Jim Catalano. To facilitate international donations, members can wire funds directly to the account; please e-mail Editor for instructions.

RECENT DONATIONS

Many thanks to the following members who made donations to the newsletter fund since October 2012:

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