

REEL FLIERS of 1930

(Second in a Series)

by Phil Stewart

Every one of us who is fascinated with that glorious period in history known as the “Golden Age of Aviation” can easily study the era through the written word and faded photographs. If lucky, we get to see one of our favorite vintage airplanes at a museum or at an air show. However, there is another resource that can help us enjoy this chapter of aviation — the Universal Newsreel. Over 14,800 reels of surviving edited stories and outtakes comprise the MCA/Universal Newsreel Library Collection. This superb motion picture news collection is available for your research and viewing pleasure at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) facility known as Archives II, in College Park, Maryland. Unfortunately, most aviation enthusiasts are unaware of this treasure trove of history.

Started in late 1929, the Universal Newspaper Newsreel (as it was then called) documented all types of people, places, things and events, including those associated with the ups and downs of aviation through the end of 1967. Today, these newsreel stories provide a unique moving-image documentation of our

aeronautical heritage, stored on celluloid film, in magnificent black and white. Along with the photograph and the written word, the newsreel should be considered one of the premier tools in the aviation enthusiast’s research toolbox.

QUIET ON THE SET!

When you begin to explore this vast collection for aviation “Golden Age” stories, it’s probably best to start at the first full year of the newsreel, 1930. That was an active aviation year and Universal produced 114 newsreel stories on the subject. Titles included:

NIPPON FLYER STARTS 'ROUND-WORLD FLIGHT
MID COLORFUL RITES
LINDY GETS A NEW "WE"
HURL NAVY PLANES FROM CATAPULT IN
SENSATIONAL TRIALS
ELINOR SMITH, IN SWOON 6 MILES UP, SETS NEW
AIR MARK
BOYD AND CONNOR HOP TO LONDON IN
HISTORIC "COLUMBIA"
48 DIE IN FIERY RUINS; DESTRUCTION MARKS
END OF ILL-FATED R-101

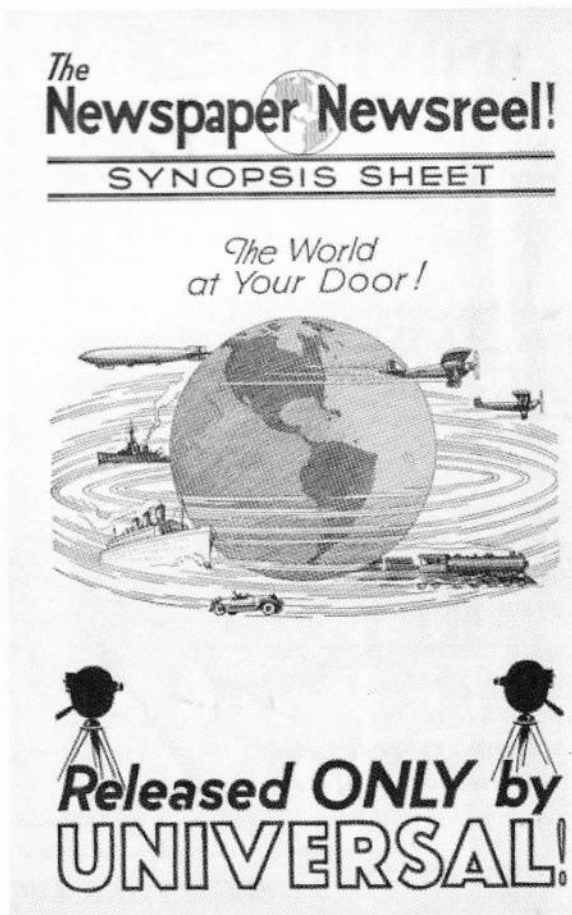
Amazingly, 87 percent of the aviation stories produced in 1930 have survived these past 82 years, and video review copies of these black-and-white films are available at NARA. While the video copies are acceptable, the quality is, well, VHS-ish.

As was the custom at the time, Universal typically destroyed the narration and music tracks for silver recovery soon after a story was released. As a result, the Universal Newsreel stories held within NARA prior to the mid-1950s are usually missing the golden-toned narration of Graham McNamee, and later, Ed Herlihy. Unfortunately, the only noise you may hear within a story about aviation’s “Golden Age” is the sound-on-film of speeches, statements made directly to the camera, and the occasional “wild” or “natural sound.” However, after some serious digging around in NARA’s files, as-recorded narration scripts were discovered for these stories and are included below.

STAND BY...

The following newsreel stories are based on catalog cards, related paper documents, microfilm records, and a review of the newsreels themselves.

Below the story title you will find the notation STORY



LINE, a section that provides an overview of the story based on the Universal Newsreel Synopsis Sheets. These single-page flyers were sent to theater managers to inform them of the action-packed stories coming in the next Universal release.

The ACTION section is next and describes the edited film scenes that visually support the story line. As noted above, because the Universal Newsreel stories are without their sound tracks, a copy of the original narration script appears in the SCRIPT section. Cameraman comments and general historical information are provided in the NOTES area. Last, the story's reel number, length (in seconds), event location, and release date are all logged in the DATA category.

Incidentally, one of the pleasant discoveries made during my research at NARA were the 1930 publicity photographs featured in this article. These photos were typically taken by Universal Newspaper Newsreel cameramen just before or after they filmed the story. The captions accompanying the photos are as they were written back in the day. To the best of my knowledge, these pictures have not been seen in over 80 years.

So, let's take an in-depth look at a few aviation related newsreel stories for 1930 as produced by Universal Pictures.

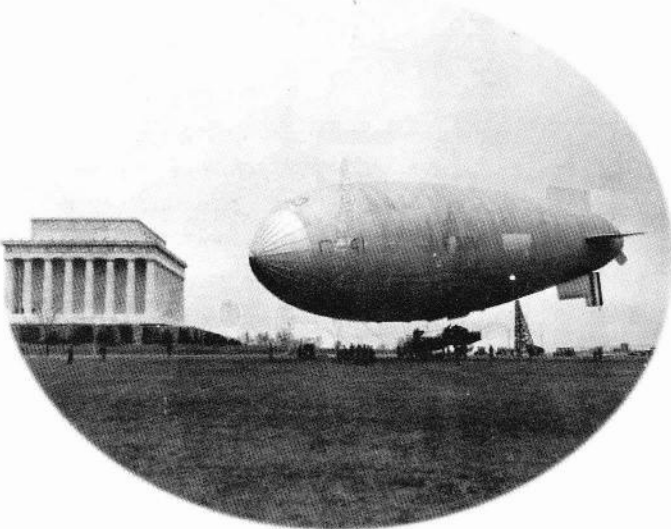
ROLL FILM...ACTION!

CRACK ARMY FLYERS LAND BLIMP IN CITY TO HONOR LINCOLN

STORY LINE: Airship battles high winds and narrowly escapes destruction from tall trees before Army Captain William J. Flood, pilot-in-command, is able to bring it to earth to place a wreath at the foot of the Lincoln monument.

ACTION: A C-type blimp at low altitude over the reflecting pool; view and the landing as seen from the gondola; a wreath is unloaded; two crewmen proceed to the monument with the wreath; airmen stand with the wreath between them.

SCRIPT: "Here comes the Army blimp, C-41, of the 19th



Crack army flyers land blimp in city to honor Lincoln.

Airship Company of Langley Field. Now let's take a ride with these brave men who are making aviation history. Our airship is bucking heavy winds and it's not easy to make a landing. That beautiful building ahead is the Lincoln Memorial and we're going to try to come down right in front of it. It was the intention of the pilots to land on the lake, but they were afraid of crashing through the ice. Now we're going down. The landing crew on the ground is ready to grab our ropes and hold us. Here we go. Nice and easy now. That's great. Captain Flood and Lieutenant Starkey have brought this wreath with them to place in the memorial as a tribute from the Army fliers in Virginia. They risked their lives to honor the birthday of the great American and they made good. True courage and something that expresses the spirit of our Army airmen. And we had a great ride, didn't we?"

NOTES: It was so cold that one of the cameras in the gondola froze up. Brigadier General Flood retired from the Army in 1946.

DATA: Reel ID: 2-12-11; Length: 57; Location: Washington, D.C.; Release Date: 02/08/30

GOV. TRUMBULL, OF CONN., FOILS DEATH IN GLIDER CRASH

STORY LINE: Although an experienced flyer, he was slightly injured on his first attempt at gliding when his machine, which was being drawn by a speeding automobile to give it momentum, crashed nose first into the ground from a height of 15 feet.

ACTION: Scenes of Governor Trumbull as he sits in the pilot seat of the glider; the glider raises, then crashes, and the crowd rushes forward; the broken glider is carried off.



Due to some vagary of fate, Governor J.H. Trumbull of Connecticut escaped practically uninjured when the glider that he was piloting over the airport here, fell and tumbled him into the snow. He is shown just before he took off.

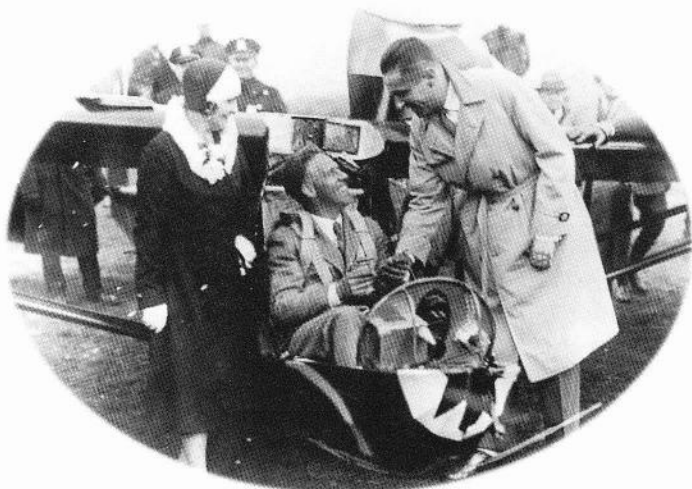
SCRIPT: "Young John Coolidge told his wife the other day that she couldn't fly any more. Well, John had better get after his father-in-law, too. The governor came all the way from the Nutmeg State to take his first ride in a glider as part of a publicity program for a new hangar. He got them plenty of publicity, all right. Well, he's ready now. He's off. O-o-oh. What a tumble for Trumbull. But he's O.K. Only scraped his leg a bit but look at the poor glider. It ain't a-goin' to glide no more. Can you imagine what John and Florence said to the governor when he got home? It'll be a long time between gliders..."

NOTES: John H. Trumbull was the Governor of Connecticut from 1925-1931. He piloted his own airplanes during speaking engagements that earned him the title of the "Flying Governor."

DATA: Reel ID: 2-15-2; Length: 38; Location: Newark, N.J.; Release Date: 02/19/30

HAWKS FIGHTS GALE AS 3,000-MILE DASH IN GLIDER TOW ENDS

STORY LINE: Tremendous crowds out to see the finish of cross-continent flight of the *Eaglet*. Police have great difficulty handling the enthusiastic throngs.



Hawks completes transcontinental glider flight. Capt. Frank Hawks, at Van Courtlandt Park, New York City, upon the completion of his flight across the country in a glider towed by an airplane. His wife (left) looks on as he receives payment of a \$100 bet that he won from Capt. Franz Carl Schlieff (right) who said he could not complete trip on scheduled time.

ACTION: A biplane tows Hawks' *Eaglet* glider; a Ford Trimotor cuts across the scene as the glider cuts loose; Hawks glides around and then lands; police control the rushing crowd; Hawks, still seated in the glider cockpit, waves his wife over and she gives him a kiss.

SCRIPT: "There they are. The plane and the glider right on schedule. Hawks has cut himself loose and is starting to come down after being towed in the air all the way across the United States. Some trip! Now for a fine landing in the park. Gosh, she's going fast. I hope he doesn't crack up. Nope. He knows what he is doing. The cops have to keep the crowd off the field or someone might get hurt, but they've been waiting in the rain a long time for this. Here he is and now he'll collect his reward. That's all right, Mrs. Hawks. We don't blame you. We're as proud of him as you are."

NOTES: The Texaco *Eaglet* departed San Diego, Calif., on March 30 and arrived in New York City on April 6. The journey took eight days (elapsed time) and 44 hours, 10 minutes of actual flying time — 35 hours of which *Eaglet* was in tow, and the remaining 10 hours spent in soaring exhibitions above scores of towns and cities. The tow plane was *Texaco No. 7*, a Waco-10 powered by a 220-hp Wright J-5 engine. It was piloted by J.D. "Duke" Jernigan, Jr.

DATA: Reel ID: 2-29-8; Length: 37; Location: Van Courtland Park, N.Y.; Release Date: 04/09/30

"DIPS BETTER'N TIPS" SAYS WAITRESS AND WINS FLYING LICENSE

STORY LINE: Beulah Unruh, a 23-year-old girl of New York, forsakes plates for planes. Her tuition cost her just \$1,300, or 13,000 ten-cent tips, but she declares it's worth it.



ACTION: A waitress serves coffee to a table of three men; she picks up the dime tips; Unruh walks up to a plane and puts on her flying togs over her waitress uniform; Unruh, now with her parachute on, Unruh climbs into the rear cockpit of the plane; Unruh in the cockpit; the plane taxis; the plane takes off.

Avi-waitress! Dips are more fun than tips, according to Beulah Unruh, 23-year-old waitress, who has forsaken waiting and taken up winging in an airplane at Valley Stream.

SCRIPT: "Beulah Unruh was tired of being a waitress--nothing but dishes and people eating -- so she collected 13,000 ten-cent tips and started a course in flying last fall. She liked planes better than plates and finally got a commercial pilot's license. If a lady flier is called an aviatrix, one might call Beulah an avi-waitress -- Oh-oh. Anyhow, she's only 23-years-old, very pretty and would rather swing a propeller than a coffee pot. There she goes -- ready to start--and not forgetting the parachute, either. You've got to hand it to her. She made the

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grade against heavy odds and deserves all kinds of good luck, working all day and studying at night and during her time off. And if you don't think that's a good takeoff you just don't know your biplanes as well as Beulah does. And pretty soon Beulah'll be giving orders instead of taking 'em. Good luck, Beulah, and a cup of coffee."

NOTES: Beulah Unruh, of 39 West 55th St., was quoted as saying, "I wanted to enter the most modern field I could find, so I turned to flying." She received a limited commercial air pilot's license on July 9, 1930, after she successfully passed tests at Curtiss Field. Miss Unruh began taking lessons in the fall of 1929 under the instruction of a Lt. Daniel Moulton. She said her tuition cost her \$1,300 or the equivalent of 13,000 ten-cent tips. The plane featured in this story is a Curtiss Fledgling, registered as NC8678, and was one of 109 owned by the Curtiss Flying Service.

DATA: Reel ID: 2-56-9; Length: 23; Location: Curtiss Field, N.Y.; Release Date: 07/10/30

GREAT SKY REVIEW FEATURES OPENING OF NATIONAL AIR RACES



Al Wilson making ready to take up an old type pusher plane at the National Air Races in Chicago, Ill.

STORY LINE: Most varied and spectacular program of flying ever seen in this country. Crack fighting groups of the Army and Navy, and visitors from Europe, vie in speed and stunt performance.

ACTION: Eighteen Navy planes flying in three-ship V-formations; a Pitcairn autogiro in flight; a Cierva C.19 autogiro lands with no roll out; Al Wilson seated in his ancient Curtiss pusher; the Curtiss plane takes off and performs stunts; spectators in bleachers; a French plane in a high speed low altitude turn; 16 Army planes fly in

the A-formation; Marine planes perform various maneuvers.

SCRIPT: "The greatest air meet in the history of aviation starts off with a bang in a marvelous exhibition of speed formation flying, each plane sticking like glue. A contrast is the autogiro in a practical demonstration of safety flying. Under perfect control she makes one of those famous drop landings, coming

to a gentle stop that wouldn't even crack an egg. Our old friend Al Wilson is on hand with his ancient pusher-type biplane, an ugly duckling compared to the graceful craft of today. But Al proves that an old-fashioned boy can do his stuff too, if he knows how. The crowd almost gets heart-failure from the grass-cutting of Marcel Doret, acrobatic champion of the French Air Service. The A-formation is the First Pursuit Group, the most spectacular body of fliers in the service. Look at that mix-up. The Marines thrill with a six-plane simultaneous loop and then the triplets, in a series of amazing maneuvers with their educated aircraft. What a day!"

NOTES: The 1930 National Air Races were held at Curtiss-Reynolds Airport, with race dates of August 23 through September 1. The cameraman's log indicates that this story was filmed on August 24, 1930.

DATA: Reel ID: 2-69-11; Length: 75; Location: Chicago, Ill.; Release Date: 08/25/30

ROY AMMEL MAKES 2,270-MILE NONSTOP FLIGHT TO PANAMA

STORY LINE: Chicago broker-aviator, flying alone in a low-wing monoplane similar to that now used by Colonel Lindbergh, hops to France Field at Balboa, Canal Zone, in 24 hours, 34 minutes. More than half his remarkable feat was over water. He's the pioneer of this sky lane.



Broker-flyer sets Panama mark. Taking off from Floyd Bennett field here, Roy Ammel, Chicago broker-aviator, goes solo on a nonstop flight to Panama and covers the 2,270 mile-stretch over sea and land in 24 hours, 34 minutes. He is the point man in this field.

ACTION: Roy Ammel beside his plane; Ammel climbs into the cockpit; the pilot waves to the camera; the plane moves towards the camera and makes a wild swerving and bouncy takeoff.

SCRIPT: "He's a Chicago broker and a bear of a pilot. He waited two months for favorable weather for his flight and this is the day of days for him. His motor is air-cooled and supercharged to nearly 500 hp at high speeds. The ship is loaded with 703 gallons of gas which should be enough. And there he goes, zig-zagging from side to side. His heavy load makes a hard takeoff, narrowly missing a couple of fool spectators who ran on the field past the police guard — but he finally makes it and he's just barely able to rise. And he's off on the first nonstop flight to Panama -- where he arrives the next day in 24 hours and 35 minutes -- with 1200 miles of the trip over water. A good job, Roy."

NOTES: Army Capt. Roy Ammel flew his Lockheed Sirius, *Blue Flash*, powered by a Pratt & Whitney Wasp radial engine, on this trip. The cameraman's caption notes state that the plane's gas tank held 715 gallons of gas, but that the gas man said he loaded 813 gallons into the plane for this journey.

DATA: Reel ID: 2-91-3; Length: 51; Location: Floyd Bennett Field, N.Y.; Release Date: 11/10/30

THAT'S A WRAP!

Well, there you go. A selective overview of aviation activities of 1930, as seen through the camera lens of the Universal Newspaper Newsreel.

If you are interested in obtaining a copy of an existing Universal Newsreel story, please contact NARA's Motion Picture, Sound, and Video Branch via email (mopix@nara.gov).

gov). As an alternative, feel free to contact a private film researcher. There's a list on the NARA website (www.archives.gov/research/hire-help/index.html). Better yet, visit College Park and take advantage of their self-help video duplication equipment to make a research quality copy. Over the last few years, NARA has partnered with companies that have produced a number of DVDs that contain a small percentage of the Universal Newsreel titles. Therefore, you might want to search on-line sources like Amazon, Barnes and Noble, or your favorite DVD retailer. With the explosive growth of the Internet, some titles are available as streaming video at various websites. Consequently, you may want to search the web for your title; you never really know what's out there in cyberspace.

The Universal Newsreel Library Collection is truly a visual time machine and a superb moving image resource. It is well worth adding to your aviation research toolbox.

About the Author

Phil Stewart is an award-winning author of eight motion picture-related NARA reference books. He is also a 2012 recipient of the J. Franklin Jameson Archival Advocacy Award given by the Society of American Archivists. Mr. Stewart's recent aviation-related title, *Aerial Aces of the Universal Newsreel: A Researcher's Guide to the Aviation Stories Released Nationally by the Universal Pictures Company, 1929-1931*, is available from Amazon.com and other online resources. He can be reached through his website at www.pwstewart.com or via email at pws@pwstewart.com.

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