

## A Bit of Local Aviation Lore

Many aviation heroes got their acclaims during the 1920's and 1930's, Lucky Lindy and Amelia Earhart, being just two figures of flying fame. Because of the publicity received for numerous record breaking events during that era, the public's interest in aviation and commercial travel was sparked. 1930 was the year that Charles Lindbergh made the record books with his speedy flight across the United States, from Glendale, CA to Long Island, NY in 14 hours and 45 minutes. His new wife, Anne Marrow-Lindberg, was on board as the radio operator and navigator. She was also seven months pregnant at the time.

Also in 1930, Navy Test Pilot Lieut. (later Admiral) Apollo Soucek broke the world's altitude record by flying a Wright Apache biplane to 43,196 feet, over eight miles up.

Before 1930, barnstormers and other planes would land in the fields surrounding Three Forks. The Three Forks Chamber of Commerce, seeing a potential for new businesses and growth, decided to back the creation of a nearby air field. It was hoped that Mamer Air Transport Co. would use the airfield as a mail stop for its Minneapolis to Spokane runs. According to the April 1930 Three Forks Herald, "The site was chosen and work started on the Three Forks airport September 9<sup>th</sup> of last year (1929). Four men with tractors were employed on the air port by Mr. Adams for about two weeks." Enthusiasm was running high, but a tragedy struck and that enthusiasm was nearly smothered.

In late March 1930, Thomas LaFever purchased a dual control Travel-Air plane. LaFever had the notion to open a training school, and brought in a pilot, H. W. Carlson to Three Forks. At the time, Dick LaFever, Tom's son, was a student of at Bert Mooney's Butte Aircraft School and Dick planned on finishing his schooling under Carlson's supervision in the newly formed Three Forks Aircraft School. The Chamber of Commerce was working with Tom LaFever to complete the airfield and get the school up and running.

Carlson and Dick LaFever flew the new plane to Three Forks from the factory in Wichita, Kansas. They went on to Butte,

where the motor was tuned up for flying at these altitudes. The plane and pilots were back in Three Forks by April 10. There were tentative plans to bring a few other planes for an exhibition in the near future, perhaps even the upcoming Easter weekend.

That Saturday afternoon, Dick LaFever had been out "to practice his work in spins" and returned the plane to the airport. Bill Gordon, a Three Forks high school youth had been, along with other youths, helping out and hoping to get a ride. Gordon earned a ride and he and Carlson took off for a flight around the area. As the pilot and passenger were returning from a trip over the Missouri, the plane stalled and was spotted going down behind Cemetery Hill.

Fearing the worst, Dick LaFever and several other youths jumped in LaFever's car and drove out. They found the plane, nosed into the ground, pilot and passenger dead.

Herman Carlson, a World War vet, was buried in Butte. Bill Gordon, 17, was an outstanding athlete and well known in the community. LaFever's aircraft school went no further.

In June, the airport was the host to two barnstormers, who showed their aviation prowess and took passengers up for flights. In late June, the "West Wind" came to town and spent the weekend flying passengers around the area. Passengers could opt for the two and half hour flight over Yellowstone Park for \$20 or a quick scenic trip for \$2. The flight over Yellowstone Park carried twelve passengers, including E. M. Mestad, Jack Sustello, Mr. and Mrs. Knalves, A. E. Barnes, Mr. & Mrs. C. P. Bales, Mrs. Coffin, August Kunze, John McCulloch, Homer Hayes and Mr. Murphy.

This visit was part of the "Mamer Tour," a 60 stop tour to stimulate aviation interest and promote the early establishment of a proposed northern airway passenger route. When the tour left for Ennis the next day, Dick LaFever joined the touring group. He was able to get some practical experience in airplane maintenance and piloting during his

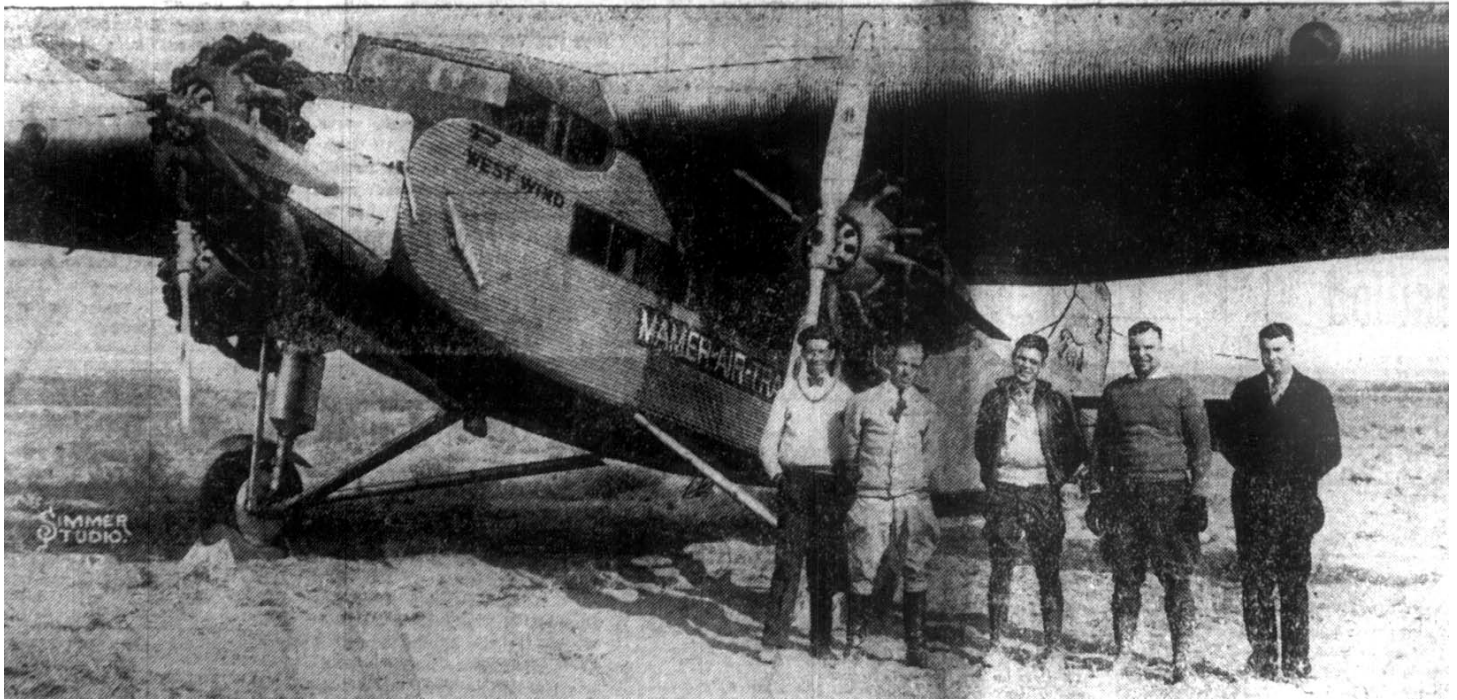


**BILL GORDON**  
Three Forks high school youth who worked all day on airport for free ride which resulted in his death.



**HERMAN CARLSON**  
Pilot of the ill-fated plane which carried he and passenger to death.

# amer Will Visit Three Forks Saturday and Sunday



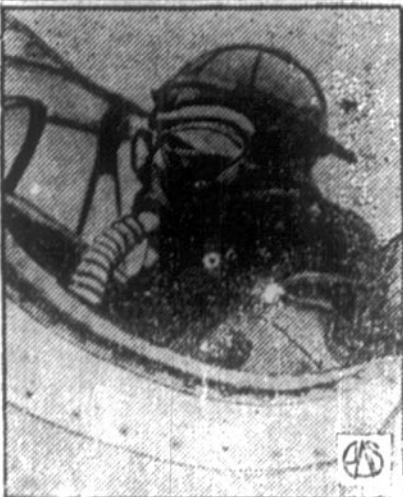
month long stay with the tour. Dick La Fever received his pilot's license in October 1930.

In the fall of 1930, a battered airplane didn't make it to the airport, but landed along the Madison River. Stanley Cavill and his passenger George Moore, both of Harlowton, "roused the ire of one of national birds while flying near here recently." A bald eagle apparently attacked their plane and tore a sizable piece of canvas from one wing of the plane, leaving behind some blood and feathers in the process.



DICK LA FEVER BESIDE TRAINING PLANE

## Flew Eight Miles up



Lieut. Apollo Soucek of the Navy in the plane in which he broke the world's altitude record. The mask is connected with an oxygen tank.

Images this page and previous page from the Headwaters Heritage Museum Newspaper Microfilm Archives

## Above The Call of Duty

An article in a 1924 edition of the Herald relates the story of heroics performed by law enforcers during the Prohibition. Charles "King of the Bootleggers" Hansen was spotted driving through Three Forks by local authorities. Deputy Howell and Under-Sheriff Jones gave chase. Hansen spotted his pursuers and sped his car to the maximum.

However, Howell and Jones were able to pull alongside the criminal's auto. In the best tradition of Buster Keaton, Jones boarded the racing vehicle and forced Hansen to stop his vehicle. Hansen and his consort, Etta Bennett, were immediately arrested. 20 gallons of 110 proof moonshine whiskey were found in the vehicle. Hansen's still was found in the Maudlow area and destroyed.