

# Oliver Andre Rosto

A Life Dedicated To Aviation

Rob J.M. Mulder



A Piece of Nordic Aviation History





Rob J M Mulder

**Oliver Andre Rosto**  
**A Life Dedicated To Aviation**

To Ella Westerås and Alvin & Rosie Grady

1st edition, 2011

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Front cover: Oliver Andre Rosto standing at the engine of the Boeing 307

*Stratocruiser*

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# Introduction

When I attended the ceremony of the induction of Oliver Andre Rosto in May 2009 I was impressed with the status this Norse-American has in the United States of America. He was not known in Norway until Hans Olav Løkken wrote an article about him in the Norwegian aviation press. He put forward the claim that Rosto was the first Norwegian to have flown as a pilot in 1909 in his Rosto Monoplane. This book will try to tell the correct story of his colorful life. Oliver Rosto, called by some the “Clark Gable of Aviation”, is nevertheless a Norse-American to be reckoned with and his work in the field of civil aviation has been significant. Research about him has revealed new facts, but it was not always possible to get some of his stories confirmed. Oliver Rosto was a man, who dedicated his life to aviation. At the age of 87 he made his last flight in a U.S.A.F. trainer, a Lockheed T-33 Shooting Star! It was a suitable end to his flying career.

Hans Olav Løkken has nevertheless managed to put Oliver Rosto on the map and get the Norwegian aviation enthusiasts interested. And we have to thank him for that. Many of Rosto's friends live in the USA so it was obvious that this book had to be written in English. It is a part in the series of books called “*A Piece of Nordic Aviation History*”. The aim of the series is to present themes from Norwegian civil aviation between 1910 and 1945. For Rosto we have made an exception as he lived well beyond 1945.

The main supporter for Hans Olav Løkken and me has been Alvin “Al” Grady, Duluth, Minnesota. He also took the initiative to suggest to the board of the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame, Inc. to have Oliver Andre Rosto inducted. On the September 2, 2008, the board would inform him that his request had been honored and on May 2, 2009, he was officially inducted. I would therefore like to dedicate this book to Alvin Grady, the man who inspired all of us in Norway to have a closer look into the life of this Norse-American. I am proud that we have managed to do this and hope this booklet reflects his life and work in a respectful way. Supporters of my work were also the Norwegian relatives of Oliver Rosto, who backed me up when I offered to write the story: Henning and Sigrid, Jan, Marit and Lene Westerås. This book has also been dedicated to their mother and grandmother, Ella Westerås, daughter of Oliver and Selma.

A special thank you goes to David Ouse, Manager of Reference Services at the Duluth Public Library. He gave access to all of the early Duluth Newspapers, which are on microfilm and even helped to search through the Newspapers. He is a Rosto fan. And Gerald Sandvick, co-author of the book *Minnesota Aviation History 1857-1945*. He began his research of Rosto in the 1980s before the book was published, but could not find any conclusive information. But his findings have been put at the disposal of Alvin Grady and me.

In addition to Alvin Grady many others have helped to compel the history and I would also like to thank these people and institutes for their contribution: First of all we all have to thank Diana Darnaby, who many years ago took the initiative to contact Al Grady and offer him the material about Oliver Rosto. She had received it from her father, Lars Lind, who was a very close friend of Oliver Rosto. She brought me in contact with Glenn Plymate, who knew Rosto from his time in Oakland.

I also came in touch with Walter Cramer, who is the grandson of Mary Rosto and how gave me information about his grandmother. Also Mrs. Arue Beaulieu Szura, who knew Oliver Andre Rosto from his days in Oakland, was able to give us more details about the last years of Rosto's life.

Many others have tried to help. In order to retrieve the date of the issuing of Rosto's first pilot's license, I had to track down many possible sources, but finally John Davis had some contacts within the American FAA, who helped me out. I would like to thank Paul Turk, Roland Herwig and George Pennington for their help. Finally these people have done their best to help me with additional information and or photographs and I appreciate their help: Alain Bourret, Mike Buescher, Jon Carr Farrelly, Michele Guess, Dan Hagedorn, Stig Jarlevik, Steve Kallan, Bill Matthews, Martina Mulder, Lars Op-land, Robert Parmenter, Christos G. Psarras, Sven Scheiderbauer (thank you for your honest opinion), Jim Schubert, Colin Smith, William T. Larkins, Barry Towey, the U.S. Embassy in Oslo and other members of the Wings of Peace- and Air Britain Forum.

I added footnotes to the chapters as there are, especially in the chapter about his flying years, many facts that are unclear and I wanted to back it up with where I got the facts from. The bibliography will include the books, newspapers, magazines and websites that have been used. I found many photographs, but many were as a rule of lower quality. I nevertheless found the pictures of such importance that I hope that the reader will forgive the poor quality of these. I believe the contribution of these photos go beyond their quality.

In 1881, this year 130 years ago, Oliver Andre Rosto was born and thus this is a good occasion to have a closer look at his life, that he dedicated to aviation. And to you the reader I can only say, enjoy reading this book.

*Rob J.M. Mulder*

Spikkestad, September 2011





# Starting a New Life

My first encounter with the name Oliver Andre Rosto was through Hans Olav Løkken. He is a Norwegian story teller and not immediately interested in aviation<sup>1</sup>. The province of Trøndelag is where his home is, and he likes to write stories about people (known and unknown), who lived there, and about those who left their home country and emigrated to the United States of America. For example, he has traveled several times to Minnesota and interviewed descendants from emigrants from Trøndelag. His stories are worth while reading and it is unbelievable what he managed to uncover.

It was therefore not a surprise that the story he wrote for the Norwegian aviation magazine *FlyNytt* (autumn 2004) and *Norsk Luftfartshistorisk Magasin* (January 2005) was about a basically unknown Trønder (as we call people from Trøndelag). In the article Hans Olav described the fantastic life of Oliver Andre Rosto and told us that Rosto and not the Norwegian Hans Fleischer Dons was the first *Norwegian* to have flown. This of course aroused much interest in Norway and people wanted to know more about this person. As an aviation historian, I was intrigued by the article and wanted to know more about Rosto. I made contact with Hans Olav Løkken, who willingly forwarded information. He had received his information from an American by the name of Alvin “Al” Grady, who lives in Hermantown, Minnesota – the State where many Norwegians have traditionally emigrated to. I wrote an article where I questioned some of Hans Olav’s conclusions<sup>2</sup>. Some of his claims were certainly well documented, but crediting Rosto with Norway’s first flight was not. But nevertheless, Rosto’s achievements were never thoroughly documented, but with his two articles Hans Olav had made a great start. My research cumulated in a visit to Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA and participation by Hans Olav, Norwegian relatives of Oliver Andre Rosto and myself, at the induction of Oliver Andre Rosto into the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame. A very nice ceremony where war veterans and former inductees supported by their family and friends, celebrated the new

inductees – all-in-all an impressive occasion. During a visit in Duluth the day before the induction ceremony, we had lunch together with Alvin Grady and his wife Rosie. It was at this lunch that I would convey to the relatives of Rosto, that I would be willing to write a book on Rosto's life. Well, here it is.

### **Oliver Andre Rosto Is Born**

Norway in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was as many other remote parts of Europe a poor nation. In this harsh environment Augustinus Parelius Olsen Bjerknes was born in the village Bjørkneset in Hemne on April 10, 1853, and was raised to become a sailor and farmer. In 1877, he married in Trondheim the lovely two years younger Anna Kristoffersdatter Røstø. Anna would give birth to no less than nine children: Gidsken Augusta Augustinusdatter Røstø (1878), Daniel Kristoffer Augustinussen Bjerknes (1879), Elisabeth Oline Augustinusdatter Belsvik (1884), Eilert Kristian Augustinus Belsvik (1886), Agnes Augustinusdatter Belsvik (1889), Nils Augustinussen Bjerknes (1892), Elina Augustinusdatter Bjerknes (1895) and Dagmar Margrete Augustinusdatter Bjerknes (1898). And then there was Oliver Andre Augustinus Røstø, who was born on August 25, 1881, at Hemne, Belsvik. He was the third born and was baptised in the local church on October 23, 1881.<sup>3</sup> In 1888, the father bought a piece of land on the west side of two farms at Bjerkneset and built his family a small house. In 1893, Augustinus purchased another plot right next to the house. Unfortunately it was not possible for young Ole to remain at the small house and it was decided that he would move in with his grandparents Kristoffer (1811 - 1903) and Elisabeth (1820 - 1915) on the island of Røstøya. This 3,300 *mål* (3,248,322 sqm/34,964,647.013 sqft) nearly uninhabited island counted just two houses and they were quite isolated from the rest. It was situated directly next to the *Trondheimsleia* – the shipping route between Kristiansund and Trondheim. The island was the property of Ole's grand uncle Hans J. W. Strøm



*Oliver Andre Augustinus Røstø was baptised in the Hemne Church. (Via [www.kirkebygg.no](http://www.kirkebygg.no))*

(1825 – 1906). As he grew up he decided to take, as his last name, the name of his grandparent who brought him up.

By the time he was starting grammar school he had to move again, now to the village of Hellandsjøen and the Svanem School, where he had to stay with an unnamed family.<sup>4</sup> This school was started in 1882-83<sup>5</sup>.

### **Moving to Trondheim**

But soon Rosto left for Trondheim. In 1888, the 18-years-old Johan Peter Lefstad imported his first bicycles from Austria. Four years later, on April 7, 1892, he founded the *Lefstad Sykkelfabrikk* (Lefstad Bicycle Factory). He continued importing bicycles and started also to repair them. Lefstad was an active man and very much interested in figure skating. He managed no less than five national championship titles and took bronze at the World Championship in Stockholm in 1897. At the age of 15, and right after his confirmation, Ole traveled to Trondheim and started as a trainee at the *Lefstad Sykkelfabrikk*. He learned the skills of building and repairing a bicycle, which helped him further on in his life.<sup>6</sup> His technical skills improved during the evening classes he took after work and he understood soon how things worked; he also study different mechanical subjects especially combustion motors<sup>7</sup>. With such a competitor as boss it was not strange that Ole became a cyclist and entered competitions. It did not seem to be a great success and the only prize he won was a bag of coffee. By 1900 we find him living at the address Nedre Møllenberg Gade 36B, together with other members of the Røstø-family<sup>8</sup>.

But Norway was still a poor country. Around the turn of the century thousands of Norwegian left their home country in search for happiness in Canada and the United States. Rosto's family talked about the idea to emigrate, but they had not the financial means to send everyone. It was therefore decided that Ole Røstø and three of his brothers and sisters (Eilert Kristian, Agnes and Elisabeth) and two uncles in the family would start the long journey. In 1902 Rosto commenced the preparations for his emigration to the USA. It seems likely that he had previously found himself a job as the ship's manifest had stated that he was leaving for West Superior, Wisconsin<sup>9</sup>. So he had some plan ready.

### **Moving to the USA**

Ole left Trondheim, on August 13, 1902 on board the S.S. *Salmo* of the Wilson Line/White Star Line (in Norway called for the *Stjerne Linje*, which is the Norwegian name for Star Line)<sup>10</sup>. He traveled via Kristiansund and Ålesund to Hull, on the east coast of England<sup>11</sup> and continued by train (this was included in the ticket) to Liverpool for the next leg of the trip. The captain of the S.S. *Salmo* was named Captain Balchen<sup>12</sup>, a familiar name in both Norwegian and American aviation circles, but not related to the Bernt Balchen we know. Somehow he came in touch



*The S.S. Celtic of the White Star Line was the largest passenger carrying vessel to sail between England and New York. Rosto was a passenger on September 21, 1902. (Via Norway Heritage Collection)*

with Ralph N. Marble, a financier from Duluth, Minnesota. Ralph Marble and his wife Bell Louisa Marble-Mead, Ralph N. Marble Jr and his wife Julia Marble were traveling from Liverpool to New York. On the ship's manifest was written that Ole Røstø traveled as servant for Mr. Marble and carried the name of Oscar A. Rosto. Also mentioned was that they were living at 1012 East, First Street in Duluth, Minnesota.<sup>13</sup> Ralph N. Marble, who died as early as July 18, 1919, was for many years prominent in the St. Louis County. In 1882 he came to Duluth and formed a partnership with M. H. Alsworth in the abstract business. It was that work which led him to engage in law practice, and in 1886 he was appointed registrar of the United States Land Office at Duluth. He left the land office in 1890 and thereafter was chiefly engaged in the practice of law until his unfortunate death in 1919. He was married to Bell Louisa Mead on June 6, 1878. The village of Marble, Minnesota, was named in his honor.<sup>14</sup>

On September 21, the S.S. *Celtic* of the White Star Line left Liverpool with the Marble family and Ole Røstø/Oscar A. Rosto on board. After eight days of sailing they arrived in New York on September 28. But his new name seems not to have suited him, so he finally changed it to Oliver Andrew Rosto. Later (around 1928) he changed his name again to Oliver Andre Rosto.

Upon arrival they traveled to Duluth. It is a port city in the US State of Minnesota and the county seat of St Louis County. The city is named for Daniel Greysolon, Sieur du Lhut, the first known European explorer of the area. Duluth and Superior in Wisconsin form the so-called Twin Ports and Duluth-Superior Harbor. The port is connected with the Atlantic Ocean, 2,300 miles (3,700 km) away. A feature of Duluth is the Aerial Lift Bridge, which spans the short canal into the harbor. When Rosto arrived in Duluth, the city had just 53,000 inhabitants.<sup>15</sup>

Initially Rosto lived at the house of the Marble Family at 1012 East, First Street performing chauffeur duties. But in the U.S. Census of 1910 it is registered that Rosto (here called Oscar H. Rosto) worked as a servant at the residence of Ralph Marble Jr. and Julia D. Marble. The address is Duluth, but the exact address is unknown.<sup>16</sup> He also worked as an auto mechanic and auto dealer for the Mutual Automobile Company, located from 313 to 319 West on First Street in Duluth.

This building still exists to this day. The company was formed in 1901 by Edward J. Filiatrault and Emil A. Nelson, selling automobiles and garage supplies. This was the first automobile dealership in Duluth. Mr. Filiatrault made the first automobile sale in Duluth in 1902. Six years later the two partners split in good understanding and Mr. Filiatrault took charge of the Mutual Automobile Company. By 1911, he had the first Ford dealership in Duluth.<sup>17</sup>

Soon after his arrival in Duluth, Rosto joined the Wisconsin National Guard and was assigned to the Company 1, Third Regiment of Captain Rossiter<sup>18</sup>. The principle of National Guard may not be so familiar in Norway. The Guard members continue the legacy of the “Minutemen” of the American Revolution—citizen-soldiers trained and ready to put their peacetime pursuits on hold when called upon to serve their state or nation. Throughout much of its history, the U.S. has maintained only a small standing army. It has primarily relied on the militia system for security which, formalized in the Uniform Militia Act of 1792, embraced the principle of universal military obligation for most able-bodied males. Militia members participated in periodic compulsory unit training musters, and were responsible for providing their own weapons.<sup>19</sup> Rosto’s name was mentioned in a newspaper article as one of the men walking in a march to Camp Douglas, a village in Juneau County, Wisconsin. The village is now home to the Volk Field Air National Guard Base. It was written that they “...with flags and drums set out for Camp Douglas with the enthusiasm of volunteers going to the front, and at the same time with the precision of step and evolution that one could expect only from regulars. The company with nearly its full strength,

*Oliver Andre Rosto moved to Duluth, Minnesota. The view here is from the year 1907.  
(Via: author)*





commanded by Captain Rossiter, marched from the armory down Tower Avenue to the Omaha depot, where at 8 o'clock they untrained for the trip. The entire company was uniformed in the regulation khaki with soft felt hats and blue flannel shirts.<sup>20</sup>

Being a chauffeur in those days was quite a challenge. Many wanted to drive faster than allowed and the result was, as nowadays, many accidents and many deaths. The chauffeurs of Duluth were no exception, but tried to change that image. Rosto was involved in a Chauffeurs' Club of Duluth, joining the many chauffeurs working in Duluth. On December 17, 1908, the automobile drivers entertained their friends at a so-called barn dance, held in the garage of the Mutual Automobile Company at 313 West 1<sup>st</sup> Street, where Rosto worked. The organizers were Fred Newman, Lon Farrell, Fred Owens, Harry Gilbert, while the floor was decorated by Rosto, Clate McGrath, Charles Duffy, Walter Ringsted, Julius Brunsberg, W.J. Shive, Alex Cosgrove, Matt Veale, Joe Carpenter and the four organizers. They would later form a separate club, but back in 1908 they were merely a group of chauffeurs meeting each other every now and then. It was the first time the chauffeurs organized such an event and the way they succeeded was great. The garage had been turned into a party room with Japanese lanterns and novel posters. On every side of the garage touring cars had been parked and from these the spectators could observe the dancers enjoying the pleasure, which the *honk-honk* men had provided. The toot of the horn and the scream of the whistle succeeded each dance number, adding a merry feature that was greatly appreciated. Punch was served from gasoline and machine oil cans



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*Rosto worked for several years at the Mutual Automobile Company. One of the autos they sold was the Chalmers "Six". (Via Alvin Grady)*



*On December 17, 1908, the automobile drivers entertained their friends at a so-called barn dance, held in the garage of the Mutual Automobile Company at 313 West 1<sup>st</sup> Street, where Rosto worked. (Author)*

by a bevy of pretty girls, who gave out sunny smiles with every drink. The music was furnished by Bluett's Orchestra and the owner of Mutual Automobile Company, Mr. Edward J. Filiatrault was the master of ceremonies.<sup>21</sup>

During 1909-1910 Rosto constructed two special motor cars for his employers at a salary of \$ 100 per month and expenses. He developed himself in being a through mechanic and expert in high speed gas motors. He drove a yellow painted car (brand unknown) through the streets of Duluth at high speed. He had quite a reputation in this city. On Sunday August 20, 1916, Oliver Rosto was arrested on complaint of Harry Harrington, a salesman from F. A. Patrick & Co. (a wholesaler of dry goods), 3240 Minnesota Avenue. He had complained to Police Captain Fiskett that Rosto was *"...driving up and down like a wild man"*. Rosto was arrested and charged with exceeding the speed limit. The next day he was fined \$ 22.50 by Judge Cutting in the Duluth Municipal Court.<sup>22</sup> Oliver was also an inventor with interesting ideas. The Duluth News Tribune reports: *"On the running gear the Duluth man has installed a sort of shock absorber, which is intended to take the jar off any sudden bump that the car may have in getting under way. How practical this contrivance, which is made of rubber, is yet to be proven"*<sup>23</sup>.

It was not until 1910 that the automobile chauffeurs in Duluth started to form a club. A similar club had already been formed in Minneapolis as a branch of the nation-wide American Automobile Association.<sup>24</sup> In 1902 a group of automobile enthusiasts had met in Chicago and formed the American Automobile Association. The Automobile Club of Minneapolis was established in the fall of 1902 for the objective surrounding *"...the instruction and mutual improvement in the art of automobilism and the literary and social culture of its members."* The turn-of-the-last-century "automobilists" had to stick together to help each other out of the mud and

onto smoother roads - literally and figuratively. Owners of the newfangled “horseless carriages” were constantly scorned and harassed. Farmers created soupy chuckhole traps and then charged a hefty fee to haul the automobile out of the muck! Cities and villages passed absurdly slow speed laws: four to ten miles per hour. Some speed limits were even kept a secret, but the fine was \$10 for every mile per hour over the limit. By 1907, it was evident that automobile clubs would be springing up around the state as enthusiasm for the horseless carriage increased. Accordingly, Mr. G. Roy Hill, then secretary of the Automobile Club of Minneapolis, set up the Minnesota State Automobile Association as a “parent” organization for all AAA clubs in the state. Auto Club dues in those days ran from \$1 to \$3 per year, because they were mainly “good roads” organizations with little in the way of expense for actual service rendered to the member. At one time, there were 103 automobile clubs in Minnesota affiliated with AAA through the Minnesota Automobile Association.<sup>25</sup> The Drivers’ Club in Duluth was formed to improve the image of the chauffeurs. Numerous accidents in the Duluth area led the drivers to organize for their own protection and for the protection of the public. They wished to discourage careless driving and to co-operate with the city authorities in enforcing the ordinances that applied for automobiles. They endeavored to aid the police in detection and arrest of chauffeurs who persistently violated the regulation that had been framed by the city officials. On May 2, 1910, Bert Russell called for a meeting at Russell’s Garage for the purpose of taking action toward the formation of the Automobile Drivers’ Club of Duluth. Mr. Ernest Shalgren was elected as temporary president and different committees were formed. The Club wanted to secure a copy of the Automobile Drivers’ Club of Minneapolis and submit them at their next meeting on May 11. Mr. Will Shay was elected Vice President, Oliver Andre Rosto secretary and Mr. Bert Russell acting treasurer. Also formed was an executive committee including aforementioned men, supplemented by Mr. William Hunt and Mr. W.H. Healy. The meeting on May 2 was attended by no less than sixty three drivers and garage owners, among them the owner of Mutual Automobile Company, Mr. Edward J. Filiatrault.<sup>26</sup>

Oliver Andrew Rosto’s brother Eilert Kristian (arriving in 1904) and two sisters Elisabeth (1907) and Agnes (1914) also came over to the USA to start a new life. Eilert moved to Superior, Wisconsin but never got married. He died in Superior in 1967 and was buried together with Martin Monnes (1870 – 1926). His sister Elisabeth (in the US also known as Elizabeth) immigrated to the USA in 1907 and married Olaf Tangen. On March 8, 1911 Elisabeth gave birth to a son by the name of John Arnold, who they raised in Duluth, Minnesota. When Agnes came to the US in 1914, she worked in Duluth, Minnesota, as a private family seamstress. Agnes married a man by the name of Hoglin, but it has not possible to establish where they married and what his first name was. She became a U.S. citizen on January 31, 1933, when she lived in New York.<sup>27</sup> On July 17, 1966 she died in the Central Hospital in Trondheim of *bronchopneumia* (acute inflammation of the walls



of the bronchioles), *haemorrhagia cerrebi* (brain stroke). She was buried at the Heim Cemetery in Hemnes, Norway. The U.S. Embassy in Oslo reported her death and informed the Department of State accordingly.<sup>28</sup>

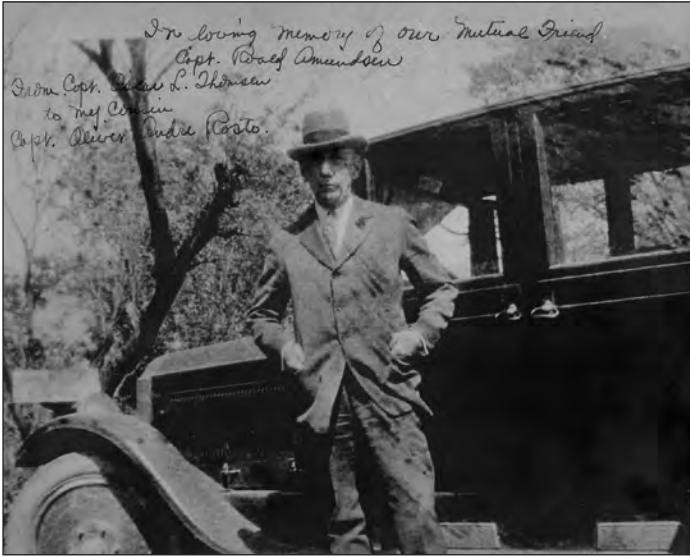
### **Visiting Norway**

By December 1907, Rosto had saved enough money to travel back to Norway for a visit to his parents. It is obvious that Rosto was a family man. Over the years he frequently returned to his native country to visit family and friends. Usually he traveled around Christmas and New Year. After spending the holidays in Norway, he returned to the USA in January 1908.

In some publications it has been suggested that he spent several years in Germany and France and made a study of aeroplanes there, but conclusive evidence has not been found. During his second return trip he stayed in Norway from September 1911 until February 1912<sup>29</sup> after which Rosto returned to Duluth: Upon his return he started the final construction of his monoplane in the autumn<sup>30</sup>. It was more likely that he made his first flight as a passenger during a latter visit to Germany and France. More about this further on.

In Duluth in 1912, Rosto was known to most as an inventor. He worked on his aircraft during the evenings, while during the day he worked for Ralph N. Marble and possibly did other small jobs. The autumn passed, winter started and in February 1913 Rosto could finally make his first flight with his Rosto Monoplane. He had become an “aviator” flying an “airship” as it was called in those days. He must have been thrilled that he had taught himself to fly and certainly his family back in Norway was proud. Despite his early flying success it is difficult to understand why he did not pursue flying further and not try to sell his aircraft or start any production of his monoplane.

Just a few months after the first flight of Rosto in his monoplane, the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen, who led the first Antarctic expedition to the South Pole (December 1911), came to Duluth. It was announced that the explorer would lecture at the Lyceum Theater on April 27. Amundsen had been traveling around the world to raise funds for his future expeditions and he expected great earnings from his American tour. He was to speak about the discovery of the South Pole. The local Sons of Norway lodge in Duluth had been the instrumental in getting Amundsen to arrange his dates so as to include Duluth. He arrived to Duluth by train on April 27, at 8.15 a.m. and was greeted by delegations from Proctor, Cloquet, and Ashland, and of course the Norwegian population of Duluth. The Normanna Singing Society rendered patriotic songs of his native land and he was greeted by a commission consisting of Mr. L.A. Simonsen, Mr. J.H. Thoresen, Mr. Peter Sundby and Mr. Chris Munkby. Amundsen was taken to the home of Dr. H. Hovde at 714 East, First Street for breakfast. In the afternoon at the Lyceum Theater at 423 West Superior Street, Amundsen told the story of his conquest of the South Pole. The lecture was



*Roald Amundsen in Duluth. After his death in 1928 this photograph was sent to Oliver Rosta in memory of Roald Amundsen. (Via Alvin Grady)*

simply called “The South Pole” and was illustrated by slides and motion pictures<sup>31</sup>. The afternoon lecture was in Norwegian, while the evening lecture was in English.<sup>32</sup> During this visit Rosta met Amundsen and they became friends. In 1918 Amundsen returned to Duluth again to address a large audience on the on-going battle of First World War and appealing to the American people to stand behind the President to the last ditch and work with 100% efficiency to end the war. Although they probably never met again, Rosta and Amundsen remained friends. After Amundsen’s death Rosta received a photograph of Amundsen from Captain Oscar L. Thomsen with a special greeting<sup>33</sup>.

### **Speed! Speed! Speed!**

Speed was what Rosta liked, and not just high speed on the road or in the air, but also on the ice during winter time. In 1913 he took off from the ice in his Rosta Monoplane and just two years later would be again on the ice of Lake Superior with his high speed Overland automobile. Mr. E. J. Filiatrault (see photograph to the right), Rosta’s boss at the Mutual Automobile Co, loved cars and had the brilliant idea to organize races on the ice of Lake Superior. The ice was thick enough to carry the weight of thousands of people and many automobiles. Filiatrault figured that Duluth could become an “Indianapolis Speedway” on the ice. The course on the ice had a length of four miles and sand was spread to aid in traction and to make



greater speeds possible. Duluth had an avenue for winter sports not open to many of the larger cities in the United States. Automobile races on ice were certain to tickle the fancy of the fans and become the King of winter sports. Although some ice races were organized in 1915, it would not achieve this status. Rosto would of course enter, but as a car driver and not flying his plane.

The first recorded ice race that Rosto entered was held in conjunction with the “Twin Ports Auto Show”. The auto show was held at the Duluth Auditorium and opened its doors on Monday, February 22, 1915 at 3.00 p.m. There were twenty-eight cars on exhibition as well as several stripped auto chassis. Hundreds attended the opening show. The grand opening was conducted by Duluth Mayor, Mr. William I. Prince. The exhibits were not so numerous as to pack the big hall, allowing ample space for spectators to move freely and to get a good view of every car at every angle. Cars on show included makes like Overland Motors, Studebaker Corporation, Metz Company, Apperson, Packard Motor Car Co, Buick Motor Co, Marmon Motor Car Co, Reo Motor Car Co, Chalmers Motor Car Co, Ford Motor Co, Maxwell Motor Co and Page Motor Co.

A car race on the ice would also occur on February 22 and again on February 28. Official records of the two races have been found. These races were quite different from each other, because of very different weather conditions. The race on February 22 was marked by standing water on the ice, while the race on February 28 had perfect cold, crisp and clear conditions. The race of “the iron monsters” on February 22, as the newspapers wrote, was not well suited for racing. Some 2,500 spectators were on the ice to see that event. The “finish line” was about a half-mile from the shore. The temperature was so high that “...*the ice started to melt and threatened to plunge the thousands of romping, yelling human beings into its icy depths, but it resulted in nothing more than the wetting of many feet*”. As a result, many feet were wetted, but most of them did not care. They crowded about the long speedway and shouted in unison at the racing motor cars. The Duluth News Tribune wrote of the course: “*A four-mile course was laid out several days ago that would have made folks down at Indianapolis, who are always crowing about how wonderful is their Hoosier speedway, begin to see green-eyed monsters*”. Alex Cosgrove, driving a Pattison’s Oldsmobile, and Ray Buchanan, driving a National, were the only contestants in the 16-mile race for big cars. Buchanan had trouble with his car and was unable to finish. Cosgrove’s time was 11 minutes 40 seconds for twice around the big oval. Rosto driving an Overland, and Cliff Oppel, in a Napier, started in the preliminary heat of the small car event. Rosto went around the track in a time of 4 minutes and 50 seconds. When it was all over – and because of the slush it was over much too soon to please the onlookers – the wade back to shore took the creases out of many pairs of trousers.

The next week saw a much larger crowd of 10,000 coming to the races. As already mentioned, the ice conditions were ideal for these speed contests and the crowd was enthusiastic to see “the iron machines” spin around the thrilling turns. That last Sunday in February saw a variety of races. Around 2.00 p.m. the throngs of people

began to make their way onto the ice. Shortly thereafter, more than 5,000 persons would be lined up on both sides of the straightaway, where the starts were made. Extra policemen experienced considerable difficulty in controlling the crowd which pressed closer and closer to the track. There was also scheduled to be a race between Harry Webster's airplane, a Curtiss Pusher, and Ray Buchanan's fast National car, but the airplane could not get into the air due to technical problems. But the race held enough spectacles without that air-car race. The Oldsmobile's sensational win of the 20-mile event was the big feature of the day. In the 20-mile event Ray Buchanan, Alex Cosgrove, Oliver Rosto and Billy Wilson were entered. The race was five laps. The report in the newspapers describes it best: "*Buchanan in his National made good speed down the straightaway but lost power after turning the curves and failed to make up lost distance. Rosto had trouble with his Overland and stopped a number of times. The Oldsmobile driven by Cosgrove took the lead early and kept it throughout. No one could keep up with Cosgrove. The last of the other cars was just finishing its fourth lap when he finished his fifth. His time was 10 minutes and 20 seconds. Wilson made it in 10 minutes and 48 seconds.*"

Another race that day was the four mile race for high-power cars. Entries here were Billy Wilson in a Palmer Singer, Ray Buchanan in a National, Alex Cosgrove in an Oldsmobile and Oliver "Norman" Rosto in an Overland. Spectators loudly cheered as the cars spun out on the ice at the start and sped down the straightaway towards the first turn. Ray Buchanan finished first, making it in 3 minutes 46 seconds, and close behind him came Cosgrove, his time being 4 minutes 1 seconds. Rosto came in later at 5 minutes flat, while Wilson's car had engine trouble and failed to finish. This race was followed by the "*Medium Power Car Event*" – a four mile race as well. Entries were Gordon Flatt in a Metz; Oliver "Norman" Rosto in an Overland; Ralph Hoyman in a Ford; Elmer Jacoby in a Ford and Cliff Oppel in a Napier. Hoyman won this event in 5 minutes and 15 seconds, with Oppel 23 seconds behind. Rosto had engine trouble and failed to finish. The third event was an eight-mile race with the high-power cars, but here Rosto had no chance and Buchanan finished first. The fourth event was again an eight mile race, but for medium cars, which had the same contestants as the four-mile race. This time Oliver "Norman" Rosto managed to win in 8 minutes and 28 seconds, finishing before Hoyman and Oppel. In addition there was a race for old-timers (!) and the day was completed by a race with motor sleds. Although short-lived, the ice races were a great success.

### **Petition for Naturalization**

The knowledge gained from the designing, building and flying of his monoplane gave him the background necessary to apply for a job in the upcoming aviation industry. He applied for a job and in the beginning of 1916 Rosto moved to New York to start working for the Curtiss Aeroplane & Motor Co. He was sent to the plant in Buffalo, New Jersey and had his residence at 213 West Utica. That year

Rosto also started to think about becoming an America citizen. This would certainly make it easier for him to get jobs. He needed affidavits and witnesses and asked two acquaintances: Ralph N. Marble and Josch Ferguson. They agreed and he filed his petition for American citizenship on June 26, 1916.

“Petition for Naturalization

To the Honorable the District Court of St. Louis County, Minnesota

The petition of **Oliver Andrew Rosto** hereby declares

First, my place of residence is: **Duluth, Minnesota, 1012 East, 1<sup>st</sup> Street.**

Second, my occupation is: **Mechanic**

Third, I was born on the **24<sup>th</sup> day of August**, anno Domini **1881** at **Trondheim, Norway**

Fourth, I emigrated to the United States from **Trondheim, Norway**, on or about the **8<sup>th</sup> day of September** anno Domini **1902** and arrived in the United States, at the port of **New York** on the **20<sup>th</sup> day of September** anno Domini **1902**, on the vessel “**Celtic**”.

Fifth, I declared my intention to become a citizen of the United States on the **21<sup>th</sup> day of September** at **Superior, Wis.**, in the **Superior Court of Douglas County.**

Sixth, I am **not** married.

I have **no** children.

Seventh, I am not a disbeliever in or opposed to organized government or a member of or affiliated with any organization or body of persons teaching disbelief in or opposed to organized government. I am not a polygamist, nor a believer in the practices of polygamy. I am attached to the principles of the Constitution of the United States and it is my intention to become a citizen of the United States and to renounce absolutely and forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, and particularly to **Haakon VII, King of Norway** of whom at this time I am a subject, and it is my intention to reside permanently in the United States.

Eighth, I am able to speak the English language.

Ninth, I have resided continuously in the United States of America for the term of five years at least, immediately preceding the date of this petition, to wit, since the **20<sup>th</sup> day of September**, anno Domini **1902**, and in the State of **Minnesota**, continuously next preceding the date of this petition, since the **3<sup>rd</sup> day of April**, anno Domini **1907**, being a residence within this State of at least one year next preceding the date of this petition.

Tenth, I have not heretofore made petition for citizenship to any court.

Attached hereto and made a part of this petition is my declaration of intention to become a citizen of the United States my affidavit and the affidavits of the two verifying witnesses thereto, required by law. Wherefore your petitioner prays that he may be admitted a citizen of the United States of America.

(Signed) **Oliver Andrew Rosto**

Declaration of Intention filed this **26<sup>th</sup> day of June 1916.**



## AFFIDAVITS OF PETITIONER AND WITNESSES

State of Minnesota, County of St. Louis as:

The aforesaid petitioner being duly sworn, deposes and says that he is the petitioner in the above-entitled proceedings; that he has read the foregoing petitions and knows the contents thereof; that the said petition is signed with his full, true name; that the same is true of his own knowledge, except as to matters therein stated to be alleged upon information and belief, and that as to these matters he believes it to be true.

(Signed) **Oliver Andrew Rosto**

Also signed by:

**Josch Ferguson**, occupation **Coal Dealer**, residing at **Duluth, Minn. 102 W. Lewis Street**

**Ralph N. Marble**, occupation **Capitalist**, residing at **Duluth, Minn., 1012 East, 1<sup>st</sup> Street.<sup>34</sup>**

After the petition was filed, he was obliged to renounce loyalty to Haakon VII, King of Norway. For this he appeared in front of the clerk J. Seguin and the deputy Marley at the Douglas County Office in Superior, Wisconsin. Here he signed a paper in which he renounced forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign Prince, Potentate, State or Sovereignty whatever and particularly to King of Norway, whereof he was a subject. It was subscribed and sworn to on September 21, 1916. But before this paper was accepted he also had to sign the oath of allegiance and swore that he would defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America. It was

finally signed on October 6, 1916. On October 6, 1916 he became an American citizen.

In June 28, 1914 the Crown Prince of Austria Franz Ferdinand and his spouse were killed in Sarajevo, the capital of the Austro-Hungarian province of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The event led to a chain of events that eventually triggered the First World War<sup>35</sup>. The United States was not directly involved until 1917. After the sinking of seven US merchant ships by German submarines, U.S. President Wilson called for war on Germany, which the U.S. Congress declared on April 6, 1917. At that time Rosto was working for the Curtiss Aeroplane & Motor Co. in New York and had become an American



*During Rosto's stay in Duluth, he usually stayed at the Holland Hotel. (Author)*

citizen. During 1917 and 1918 all U.S. males between the age of 18 and 46 were required to register for the US Army draft. Rosto was at that moment 37 years old. He registered as Oliver Andrew Rosto in Buffalo on September 12, 1918 and gave his address in Buffalo.<sup>36</sup> But he did not have to fight in Europe. He was at that time too old. But by now he had managed to start a better life and was earning good money.

### **Starting a New Life**

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1 See <http://historiefortelleren.no/main/>

2 See [www.europeanairlines.no](http://www.europeanairlines.no)

3 See <http://hemneslekt.net/>

4 Article by Hans Olav Løkken about the life of Ole Augustinus Røstø, published in the Norwegian aviation magazine *FlyNytt* (4/2004) and *Norsk Lufthistorisk Magasin* (1/2005)

5 *Årboken for Fosen 1993*, page 111

6 [no.wikipedia.org](http://no.wikipedia.org)

7 *U.S. Navy, Application for examination for profession, scientific, or technical positions*, April 1919

8 Take from the *1900-census* published on the Norwegian Digital Archive on the internet. Here he was listed as staying with family. He lived together with other Røstø family members.

9 *Emigrants from Trondheim 1867-1930*, from the Norwegian Digital Archive on the internet. He was registered on 13 August 1902 and left from Trondheim. His ticket had been paid from Trondheim.

10 *Emigrants from Trondheim 1867-1930*, from the Norwegian Digital Archive on the internet.

11 The S.S. Salmo sailed between Trondheim and Hull. From [www.norwayheritage.com](http://www.norwayheritage.com).

12 *Emigrants from Trondheim 1867-1930*, from the Norwegian Digital Archive on the internet.

13 Ship's manifest of the S.S. *Celtic*, supplied by Alvin Grady.

14 *Duluth and St Louis County, Minnesota*, Volume II, by Walter van Brunt, 1921.

15 [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)

16 Extract from the 1910-U.S. Census as found on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

17 From: [www.clubrunner.ca/CPrg/DxProgramhome/programhome.aspx?cid=1307&pid=49859](http://www.clubrunner.ca/CPrg/DxProgramhome/programhome.aspx?cid=1307&pid=49859)

18 Article from News Tribune Superior, July 7, 1906

19 [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)

20 Article from News Tribune Superior, July 7, 1906

21 Article from the Duluth News Tribune, December 18, 1908

22 Article from the Duluth News Tribune, August 22, 1916

23 Article from the Duluth News Tribune, March 29, 1912.

- 24 Article from the Duluth News Tribune, May 3, 1910
- 25 Website of the AAA Minneapolis.
- 26 Article from the Duluth News Tribune, May 3, 1910
- 27 Information found on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) and [www.familysearch.com](http://www.familysearch.com).
- 28 Report of the death of an American citizen, issued by the US Embassy, dated August 19, 1966
- 29 Application for a passport, dated 14 June 1920 and prolonged 4 June 1921 at Christiania, Norway.
- 30 *The Duluth Herald* of 21 January 1913.
- 31 These slides were believed to have disappeared, but were recently rediscovered on the attic of Amundsen's home in Norway! They are presently on display at the Fram Museum in Oslo.
- 32 *The Duluth News Tribune* dated February 19 and April 27, 1913.
- 33 See photograph further on in the book.
- 34 Petition for Naturalization dated June 26, 1916.
- 35 [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)
- 36 Registration Card of Oliver Andrew Rosto for the U.S. Army, dated September 12, 1918.



# The Flying Years

On December 7, 1903 the Wright brothers had the first successful recorded flight in a heavier-than-air craft. The two bicycle repair men had managed to design, build and fly their own airplane, the Wright Flyer, and get it into the air: A fantastic achievement. Meanwhile in Europe this event had only been noticed in smaller circles and it was not until 1906 that the Dane Jakob Ellehammer (in Denmark) and Brazilian Alberto Santos-Dumont (in France) made the first flight in Europe. It is also amazing to see how fast the development of the airplane went from this point on. It is noteworthy that France superseded the USA and managed to become the leader in the world of aviation. Everybody who wanted to learn to fly came to France to purchase an airplane. The French were smart, because those who bought an airplane had a training session included. Many Europeans therefore held a French pilot's license once they returned to their home country.

It took some time before the facts of the Wrights' first flight were made public. Meanwhile, the Wright brothers worked to improve their airplane, but at the same time tried to keep a low profile. They wanted to protect their invention. It was not until claims about people making the first flight of a heavier-than-air craft started to be made public that they had to inform others about their exploits back in 1903. They made some flights in France and astonished the French. Soon afterwards, all over the US and Europe, the airplane developed rapidly and new ideas were implemented, resulting in more controllable airplane. The first attempts with monoplanes were made as well. In France the early monoplanes were designed and constructed by Gabriel Voisin and Louis Blériot. As early as 1908 Louis Blériot developed and built a practical monoplane (the Blériot VIII), which evolved into the successful Blériot XI, the type used to cross the English Channel on July 25, 1909. This was a great milestone in aviation.<sup>1</sup>

Back in Minnesota, Rosto's home state, aviation evolved as well. Minnesota has an interesting aviation history. It was a perfect environment for Rosto to develop his

technical skills. The development of the heavier-than-air craft had a good start in Minnesota. And flying was of course very popular “entertainment”. People loved to come and see men fly their biplanes. The first attempt in the State can be credited to two friends, Ralph Wilcox and Ashley C. Bennett. They constructed and built a biplane, quite similar to the Wright Flyer and attempted to take off from the ice on Lake Minnetonka. “*The machine barely got into the air... I’ve seen skiers go higher*” Harry Wilcox said. In other words, it was not successful. A second attempt with a stronger engine failed also and the two decided to return to the automobile business.<sup>2</sup> Another attempt was made by John O. Johnson, who built an airplane with a wing span of 30 feet and powered it with a 20hp engine. He failed, but did manage a short 200 feet long, 20 feet high flight in January 1910. Despite ambitious plans for a monoplane, his name and fame vanished with the wind.<sup>3</sup>

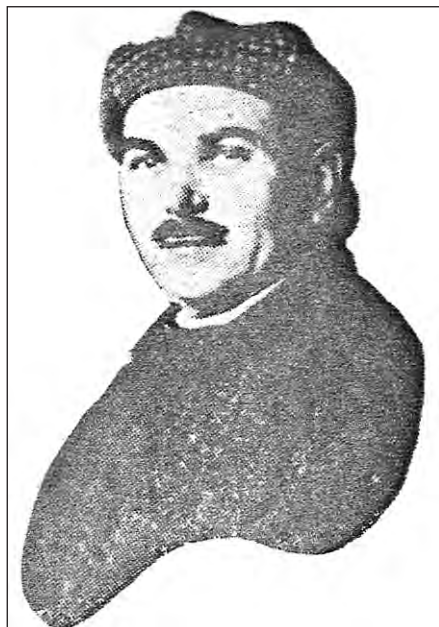
In January 1910, Frenchman Louis Paulhan made a tour through the USA with two Farman biplane and two Blériot monoplanes. The monoplanes were for the Americans some of the most “modern” airplanes the Americans had ever seen. The newspapers informed its readers in detail. The first US monoplane designed, built and flown was the Pfitzner Monoplane in 1909. Alexander L. Pfitzner worked at the workshop of Glenn H. Curtiss, but was allowed to design and construct his own monoplane. Eager to avoid any of the Wright Brother’s patents he designed *a lateral control by means of telescoping wingtips, extending one tip to increase the lift on that side*<sup>4</sup>. He had limited success with his monoplane, flying on December 21, 1909, which earned him the distinction of flying the first American monoplane<sup>5</sup>.

The first flights in Minnesota were made during the Twin City Aviation Meet at the State Fair Ground in Minneapolis-St. Paul, between June 22 and 25, 1910. The group of aviators was led by Glenn Hammond Curtiss, the third American to fly after both Wright brothers. The young and ambitious Glenn was born on May 21, 1878 in Hammondsport, New York State. At an early age it was clear that he was inventive and loved racing. At the age of 12 he moved with his parents to Rochester, NY and held small jobs before he returned in 1897 to Hammondsport, where he went to work in a bicycle repair shop. Three years later he started his own bicycle business, the G. H. Curtiss Manufacturing Company. He wanted to combine bicycles with light engines and had already constructed many light engines. He won several awards for his designs. About this time, the car industry started to catch his eye and Curtiss became a local agent for several different makes. The quality of his air-cooled engines was astonishing and he became the “fastest human” of the world on January 24, 1907, when he posted an unprecedented speed of 137 mph with his car. He started to build custom-built engines and his engines powered the dirigible airship *California Arrow* of balloonist Thomas Scott Baldwin, who made the first circular flight in the United States on August 3, 1904. Baldwin moved his factory from California to Hammondsport (1906) and started to work together with Curtiss. The young American now supplied most of the engines to airships in the United States and also the U.S. Army introduced them on theirs. Curtiss was fast

becoming famous and on March 4, 1909, the aviation pioneer Augustus M. Herring joined him to form the Herring-Curtiss Company (formed on March 4, 1909). They sold their first Curtiss-built airplane to the New York Aeronautical Society. At the request of this association, the Curtiss-Herring No.1 *Reims Racer* was built. It would represent the USA in the 1909 Gordon Bennett Cup Race held between August 22 and 29, 1909, at Reims, France. The biplane type was known as a pusher, i.e. that the engine and propeller were behind the pilot and pushed the airplane forward. It was a single-seat machine with single surface wings, biplane forward elevator on long forward booms, and fixed horizontal stabilizer located with rear rudder on long rear beams. This particular airplane had a new 60hp V-8 engine, which was secretly guarded and surprised all the European participants in the Gordon Bennett Cup Race. Curtiss won the cup for the USA by completing a 20 km closed course at a world's speed record of 43.35 mph (60.76 kph)!<sup>6</sup>

Back in Minnesota the people at the Twin City Aviation Meet were more than enthusiastic about the flights performed during the meet and impressed to see Curtiss fly, despite the fact that many of the flights lasted only a few minutes. It is likely that Rosto was one of the spectators.

But it was also in Paris, France that Rosto supposedly would have experienced the ultimate kick: flying in an airplane. Among others, Hans Olav Løkken had a newspaper article in which it was written that Jim McCrudden, one of the bird men who had made himself famous in aviation, was a friend of Rosto and offered Rosto the opportunity to make a flight in the Herring-Curtiss No.1. Rosto could of course say nothing else other than "Yes!"<sup>7</sup> And so on November 15, 1909 he boarded the small biplane and Jim McCrudden took Rosto into the air for the first time<sup>8</sup>. The flight would not have lasted too long, but Rosto was now definitely bitten by the aviation virus that would not leave him until the day he died. This day in November can therefore be noted by all Norwegians as well. It was the *first Norwegian civilian passenger in a heavier-than-air craft* (In September 1909, Norwegian Captain Einar Sem-Jacobsen was in Berlin the first Norwegian *military passenger* in the Wright Military Flyer). This honour, although he probably was not aware of it at the time, befell Oliver Andre Rosto. It may well have happened that he was given the opportunity to hold the steering wheel and become the first Norwegian citizen to have flown a heavier-than air craft, but in general these aviators were not too keen on handing over control of their expensive airplane. So Rosto's claim to have flown (solo) may not hold. It took many hours of training before one could fly solo. Some sources, including Rosto (but only *after* the First World War), claimed that *he himself flew that day*. The first time he spoke about this event was in March 1912. He said in a newspaper article that he had flown as *a passenger* with Jim McCrudden<sup>9</sup>. We therefore lack sufficient evidence that he flew himself, other than as a passenger. In addition, on January 21, 1913 he said to Jimmy Ward, who wanted to buy the Rosto Monoplane that "*he wanted to become an aviator himself*"<sup>10</sup>. So that means that he could not have flown as pilot before that date.



*Left: Oliver Andre Rosto without a moustache in 1912 and  
Right: With a mustache in 1913.*

There are another two “but” to this story. According to a passport application<sup>11</sup> he was not in Europe in 1909. He informed that he was in Norway between December 1907 and January 1908. His next visit started in September 1911 and lasted until February 1912. So this makes it difficult to accept that he flew in Paris in 1909. Did he fly on November 15, **1911**? He was in Norway (and Europe) at that point.

Another “but” is the pilot Jim McCrudden. There was a pilot called James McCudden (without the “r”), who was British, but did not become a pilot until 1915. This British ace (57 victories) was shot down on July 9, 1918. That leaves us with the question: Is there any other pilot known with this name or was the name misquoted in the newspaper? Rosto never repeated the name of the pilot he flew with, so we have no second source to fall back on. An alternative is a man called John Alexander Douglas McCurdy, who actually had a Curtiss Pusher, flew with passengers and could thus have been the correct person. The contemporary newspaper might have written the name incorrectly. Research in France, made it clear that McCurdy never flew in Paris. That would mean that Rosto flew somewhere in the United States, perhaps in New York or somewhere else. We will never know.

I am quite certain that Rosto was at Billancourt Aerodrome near Paris, during the winter of 1911-12. This is where Louis Blériot had its factory and training school. He saw the beautiful Blériot XI in the air, and later expressed: “*I stared open-mouthed at Blériot floating above the earth in his plane*”. Determined to build such an airplane himself, “*...I packed up my belongings and went home to Duluth*”.<sup>12</sup>

With this experience and the new knowledge about monoplanes Rosto returned to the USA. He had been working since 1907 to put together an airplane. We know for certain that he worked on such a project, because he sworn in his U.S. Navy job application that he had started that year on designing and constructing a monoplane<sup>13</sup>. His encounter with a Blériot monoplane in Paris would certainly have given him the final push to continue.

The first Minnesotan to design, build and fly successfully was not Rosto. The auto mechanic Fred Parker from St. Paul had built a simplified monoplane based on the ideas of Farman. He learned the trade from Glenn H. Curtiss. It was not until August 26, 1910, that he made his first flight in his monoplane. He stayed aloft for eight minutes.<sup>14</sup>

Back in Duluth, people were also waiting for the first powered flight above their city, which was so beautifully situated at the shores of Lake Superior. It would be Thomas McGoey, who would make Duluth's first flight. He took his Curtiss-biplane in the air on October 15, 1911 from Athletic Park, a baseball field located at 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue West.<sup>15</sup> Rosto missed this event, as he was in Norway at the time.

Upon Rosto's return from Europe (in February 1912), he continued working on an aircraft of his own design. In the winter of 1912 Rosto's aircraft was close to being finished. He understood that a suitable landing field would be difficult to find during the wintertime. Athletic Field would be too small and Rosto was not even sure his airplane could fly. Therefore he needed more space. Earlier flying attempts by Ralph Wilcox and Ashley C. Bennett and also more recently by John O. Johnson were done from the snow or ice on a lake. He therefore equipped his monoplane with both skis and wheels (more about this later). It was obvious that his monoplane would have to take-off and land from the ice on Lake Superior; just a few hundred yards from the site where he had constructed his airplane. The ice on the lake offered a relative smoother surface than any piece of land could offer.

As mentioned before, Rosto worked as a chauffeur for Ralph N. Marble. In



*“The Auditorium”, which was located at the corner of 1<sup>st</sup> Street and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue East in Duluth. (Via Alvin Grady)*



addition he worked as an auto mechanic and dealer for the Mutual Auto Company in Duluth. He constructed his monoplane outside working hours in a building called "The Auditorium", at the corner of 1<sup>st</sup> Street and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue East. This centrally located building was the property of The L. Hammel Company and was a place for small and big meetings. It had a size of 140x80 feet and was "*well adapted for conventions, mass meetings, balls, assemblies, or any occasion for the gathering of large number of people*"<sup>16</sup>. It is certain that Rosto was working on plans for an airplane during the period 1907-1911. But the construction was possibly not started until 1911. In addition, "The Auditorium" housed a garage on the ground floor, which might be where he borrowed tools<sup>17</sup>. The building is no longer there, and the site now houses parking facilities. At the end of March 1912 Rosto's monoplane was ready and he was merely waiting for a new 45hp Curtiss engine and Curtiss propeller to arrive from New York. The partly finished monoplane had been seen by well-known aviator James "Jimmy" Ward during the fall of 1912 and Ward was very enthusiastic about it. So enthusiastic, that Ward offered to buy the airplane with a good profit for Rosto. But Rosto refused and said he wanted to fly the monoplane himself.<sup>18</sup>

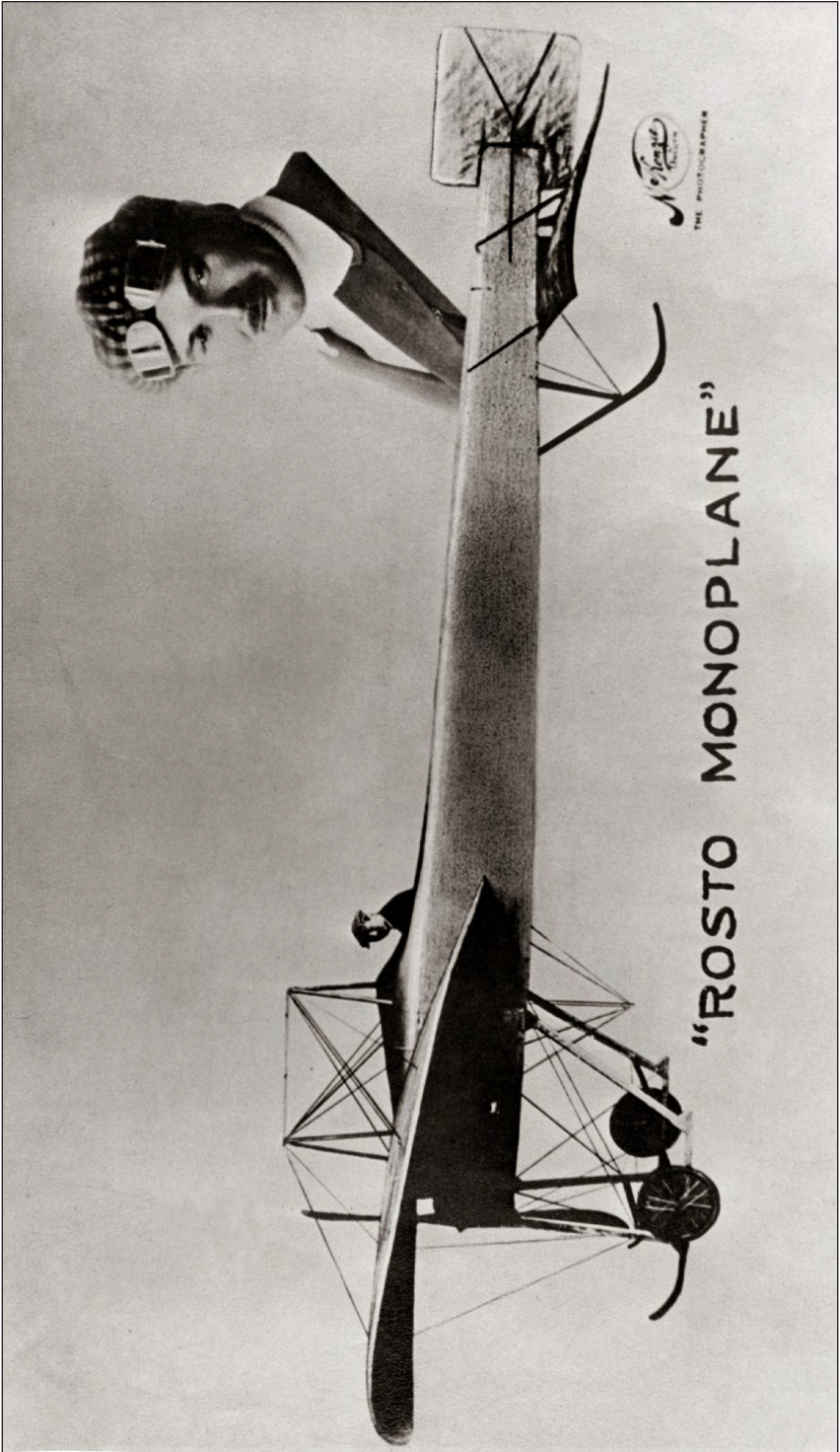
It was reported that the monoplane had been at "The Auditorium" for some time, but as soon as the weather moderated it would be taken down to the harbor for its first flight. It is not known why the engine was not mounted that winter. Rosto had uttered to the newspaper that the engine "*...has already been shipped by freight from New York. It is expected within a few days*".<sup>19</sup> The engine probably did arrive, but the mounting would take time and might even require modifications of the airframe. Another factor may well have been the melting of the snow and ice, that would make a save take-off impossible. Regardless, no flights were made in 1912 and the engine was possibly returned.

Another spring, summer and autumn passed without any flying activities for Rosto in Duluth: Others made a flight, among them John Geistman in a Curtiss Pusher from the Wade Stadium at Duluth<sup>20</sup> and James "Jimmy" Ward on August 3 and 4 from Athletic Park, where more than 6,500 people saw him fly. *The Duluth News Tribune* reported in an article "*...His flights both days were marked by the ease and evident sureness with which they were accomplished. Everything demonstrated that Mr. Ward is not only a masterly aviator, but that his machine, "Shooting Star" is of the best type*".

But new ice on Lake Superior in the winter of 1912-13 was certain to come and offered new opportunities for Rosto. Meanwhile, Rosto had ordered a new type of engine from France: a 35hp Anzani V with two-bladed propeller (see below). During its day, this was a modern engine and of the same horsepower as the Blériot XI used back in France. Rosto's first flight now seemed eminent.

## **The Airplane**

Rosto's monoplane was in one word beautiful and it is a pity not more flying had



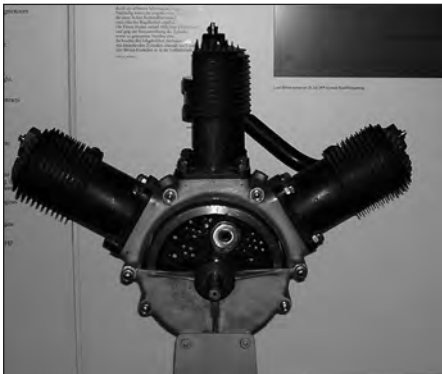
*Moisant*  
THE PHOTOGRAPHY

**"ROSTO MONOPLANE"**

been done with it. Basically the monoplane was inspired by the Blériot XI, which he had seen in Paris. Not many measurements are known, but here we see them compared with the Blériot XI:

	<b>Rosto Monoplane</b>	<b>Blériot XI</b>
Overall length	35 ft (10.67 m)	26.24 ft (8 m)
Wing span	30 ft (9.14 m)	23.61-27.55 ft (7.20 m- 8.40 m)
Minimum speed	40 mph (64.28 kph)	46 mph (75 kph)
Maximum speed	50 mph (80.35 kph)	-
Engine	35 hp Anzani V	35 hp REP 7cc
Propeller	Two-bladed	Two-bladed

The Rosto Monoplane was larger than the Blériot XI both in length and wing span. The engine had the same horsepower. The speed of the Rosto Monoplane was lower than of his French counterpart. Furthermore, the Rosto Monoplane was a single-seated, tractor monoplane with a square section fuselage made of longerons and tightened by steel wires. The whole fuselage including the engine was covered. It was constructed all of hickory and elm. The wings were braced with piano wire and screws and steered from the fuselage by loosening the cables connecting them together. Silk and rubber composition covered the wings. The landing gear was connected to the fuselage by two A-shaped struts and forward facing skis had been added to avoid a tip-over on the nose causing damage to the propeller. It gave the airplane also the possibility to take off from the snow, but that was not the main objective of the skis. The wheels had spokes. There was a skid at the rear end of the fuselage. The elevator wings were situated under the fuselage and connected by wires to the open cockpit. The tail had a square form and was also controlled by wires. In front of the cockpit were two V-shaped struts turned upside-down that held the wires to the wings.



### **The Engine**

The 35 hp Anzani V-type engine was purchased at a price of 3,900 French Francs, quite a lot of money at the time. It was water-cooled 4-cylinder, V-type engine, having the cylinders cast in pairs with the valve chambers at each end of the casting. The exhaust valves for opposite cylinders were controlled by the same cam wheel by means of rock-levers; this mechanism was of course in duplicate, as



it was required at both ends of the engine. The inlet-valves were automatic. Steel pistons with cast-iron rings were used; the lubrication was of the splash system. The crank-chamber was a two-part cylindrical aluminium casting joined vertically in the center. Two bearings supported the crank and the crank chambers enclosed two balanced flywheels. The cylinders were set at 45°, and the order of firing was from one cylinder to its opposite, then diagonally across, and so on. The firing intervals were not equal throughout the cycle of two revolutions, owing to the displacement of the axes of the cylinders in the V formation. There were two periods of 180° (*i.e.* a half-revolution), but the other two were 180° plus or minus 45°. Thus if the first interval was  $(180^\circ - 45^\circ) = 135^\circ$  then the second would be 180°, the third  $(180^\circ + 45^\circ) = 225^\circ$ , and the fourth 180°. The crank-shaft had two cranks set at 180° apart, and each crank carried two connecting-rods, one being forked to bridge the other on the journal. Dimensions: 100 mm by 120 mm; weight 83 kilograms; 35 hp at 1,600 rpm.<sup>21</sup> This engine was first built in 1910.

With a new engine in place, Rosto could mount it in his monoplane. His first flight was announced in the press for the first time on January 21, 1913, when *The Duluth Herald* reported that "...Duluth man will fly from ice in harbor, in home made aeroplane"<sup>22</sup>. It could easily be claimed that there was no question but that Rosto's monoplane was practical in every respect and would fly. Rosto was of course enthusiastic as the big moment approached, for he had been working on it each night for months in an effort to get it ready to try out before the ice went. For reasons unknown, he had to wait for another month before he could take his monoplane to Lake Superior.

February 26, 1913 was a cold winter morning in Duluth as usual. A small boy



was mesmerized by the sight he saw in these early hours. He could not believe his eyes, when he saw gentlemen drag a white contraption down 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue East towards the shores of the frozen lake. He had never seen such an apparatus and was curious about what was going on. Among the gentlemen were Oliver Rosto and his mechanic Charley Willis. They took the airplane carefully down the slippery road from *The Auditorium*, where it had been stored, to the ice and started to prepare its first flight. Wind direction was checked and the airplane placed against the wind. Rosto performed a final check of the many wires and screws, while others came with gasoline for the engine. Oil was put into the oil carrier at the last moment and the airplane was now ready for its first flight. The young boy had come down to the ice and was soon surrounded by numerous other spectators and journalists eager to see what was going to happen. Rosto climbed into the open cockpit of the fuselage and put his flying glasses on. Willis turned the propeller around. Rosto started up the engine, the airplane started to roll and before he knew it he had managed to take-off after just a short take-off run. “*It rose like one of the early spring birds...*” the newspapers wrote<sup>23</sup>. The young boy could not believe his eyes when he saw the apparatus climbing into the air – a spectacular sight. Rosto’s first flight had a length of about a quarter of a mile, after which Rosto landed the airplane smoothly back on the ice. He was congratulated by Willis and the spectators present at the first flight. Just as Rosto was about to take off for a new flight, the engine made stirring noises and the machine quivered and one of the cylinders flew off with a hissing sound. It missed Rosto’s head by inches and while friends and others were congratulating the aviator for the second time on his narrow escape – one from the air and the other from the cylinder – Willis put his hand to his side and said “*hit*”, or words conveying the same general meaning. Hastily the group moved and shifted from Rosto to Willis.

“*I believe I’ve been hit*”, he cried.

Sure enough, he was. The head of the cylinder went by the bean of Rosto and almost by Willis. It struck him in the side, or grazed, perhaps was the better word, tearing a hole as clean as a knife-cut in his coat and leaving a trail of blood. Willis was attended to and then taken to a doctor.

The reason for the exploding cylinder was that someone working around the machine put too much ether in the gasoline. The flying machine was returned to *The Auditorium* and a new cylinder was ordered from Anzani in Paris. Until delivery of this cylinder, the airplane could not fly.<sup>24</sup>

The use of the airplane up to July 1913 is unknown, but it has been confirmed that he made a further twelve flights and had some minor crashes. He said to a journalist in 1944: “*The airplane had just one speed. I would press the button; she would scoot along, take to the air at 50 mph and remain there until I got her down again*”.<sup>25</sup>

Now, Rosto cannot claim to have been the first Norwegian citizen to have flown a airplane/monoplane. The first heavier-than-air craft to make a flight in Norway was the Blériot XI of Baron Cederström on October 14, 1910 from Etterstad in

Christiania. But the first Norwegians to have flown a monoplane in Norway were: On June 1, 1912, the Norwegian lieutenant Hans Fleischer Dons made the first *military flight* of a Norwegian-owned airplane (a monoplane of the type Rumpler Taube) followed on July 28 by Christian Lie, who made a *civilian flight* in a Grade monoplane from a field near Elverum. Later that year a Deperdussin was imported by Norske Flyveselskap AS and put together by Jul Hansen. This airplane (also a monoplane) made its first flight on May 12, 1913 from a field at Majorstuen in Christiania.<sup>26</sup> But Rosto was the first to have designed, built and successfully flown his own monoplane. He was not the first Norwegian to have flown a monoplane.

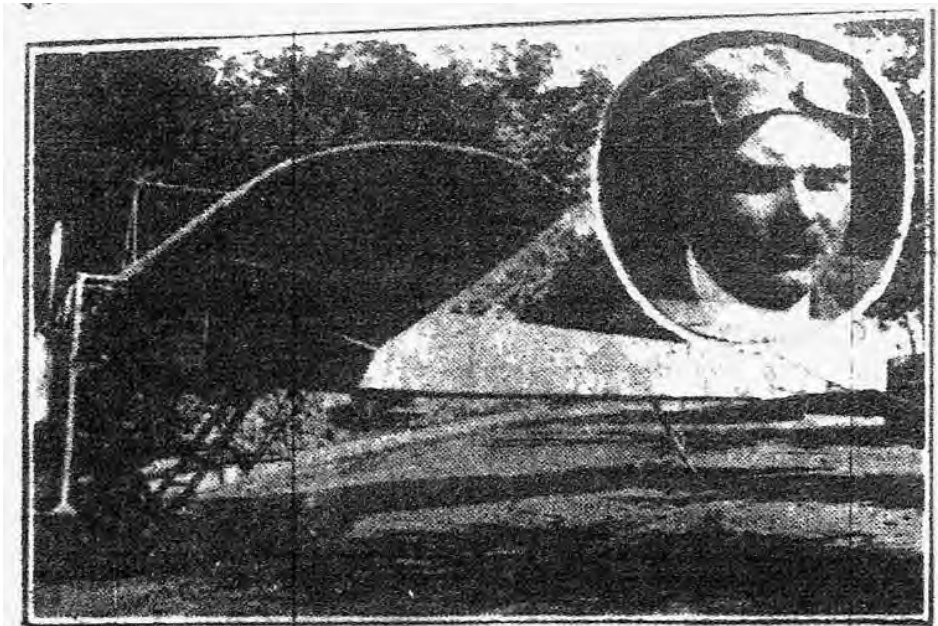
### The Flying Display in Duluth

In June 1913, *The Duluth News Tribune* thought it would be a good idea to start up a contest to do some advertising for the Rosto airplane and in the process let the readers of the newspaper suggest a name for his monoplane. The new name would be revealed on July 4<sup>th</sup>, the Day of Independence. That same day Rosto would make some demonstration flights. Rosto was introduced as “the demon of the air Rosto” in his “daring airship”. He would take off from a well-known site for aviators in Duluth, Athletic Park. Furthermore, a wrestling match between Walter Miller and Joe Carr was scheduled, where admission was charged. The audience would have to pay \$ 0.75 or \$ 1.00 depending on the seating.

Many ideas were received. In the newspaper’s edition of June 28, 1913 it was written: “*From the way letters are pouring into the sporting editor’s office suggesting names for O. A. Rosto’s new monoplane, the machine is destined to become popular in Duluth and the surrounding country. The first mail yesterday brought numerous clever names while others wanted further information regarding the contest. The conditions are plain. Send in your suggestion with your name and address. These will be turned over to competent judges who will select a name and the author of the one chosen will be given the honour of christening the monoplane at Athletic Park July 4, when the big*

—GALA—  
**4th of July**  
Rain or Shine.  
**AT ATHLETIC PARK**  
Starting at 3 P. M.  
Daring airship flight by the demon  
of the air  
**ROSTO**  
**Walter Miller and Joe Carr**  
Champion wrestlers.  
Boxing by Champions of the Ring.  
Admission, 75c and \$1.00.

*Announcement in the “The Duluth News Tribune” about the scheduled flight and wrestlers match on July 4, 1913. (Via Alvin Grady)*



*Oliver Andre Rosto and his airplane to be christened at Athletic Park, Duluth on July 4, 1913. (Faximile from "The Duluth News Tribune")*

*double-jointed athletic program will be put on. Rosto will attempt his first flight in the monoplane which is of his own make and bears numerous improvements over the Bleriot monoplane.*"<sup>27</sup>

On the date of the disclosure of the name, the Rosto Monoplane was carefully transferred from "The Auditorium" to Athletic Park. They disclosed the name on July 4: "DULUTH NO.1" – an appropriate name. Who the winner of the contest was and subsequently christened the Rosto Monoplane is unfortunately not known.

The flying display had to be cancelled. The reason can be found in a headline in the newspaper the day after: a "*terrific storm breaks over holiday crowds, many buildings hit*". The wrestling match was postponed when rain soaked through the canopy over the outdoor platform. The Rosto Monoplane which was on the field carefully covered by heavy canvas was nevertheless the center of attention for the admirers at the park. Rosto's airplane was dripping despite the fact that it was draped with a large canvas covering. Obviously Rosto's scheduled flying display was rained out and never rescheduled. The wrestling match was rescheduled twice and finally took place on July 8, 1913. It ended in a draw.

So what did Rosto think about his airplane? It has been difficult to find any comments, but one can be found in an article in the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* where he said: "*I know practically nothing about flying. I never made long flights, because, basically, the airplane was not so good and did not withstand too much strain.*"<sup>28</sup> That explains also why he did not precede with the construction of any further airplanes. He felt the airplane was not good enough.



## **Working for Curtiss**

After his first flight in February 1913, Rosto had made a name for himself. Aviation and motor car circles in the Duluth and Superior area were small in those days and everybody knew everybody. Three people working closely together were Frithiof "Fritz" G. Ericson, Roger and Anthony "Tony" Jannus. Between May 1909 (when Ericson came to the Superior, Wisconsin) and the beginning of 1913 Ericson made quite a name for himself in the motor circles through his experiments with iceboats driven by airplane propellers. Ericson had obtained this interest in Sweden. He had worked until 1907 at a large shipyard in Stockholm, which turned out some classy speed and pleasure boats<sup>29</sup>.

In the beginning of 1914 Tony Jannus had come to Duluth to demonstrate his Benoist flying boat, named "The Lark of Duluth". Ericson helped Jannus out and in return Jannus taught Ericson to fly. Later Ericson decided to leave the automobile and boating business and start to work with the Jannus brothers at the Benoist Aeroplane Company. In October 1914 Ericson and the Jannus-brothers resigned and formed their own company in Baltimore, Maryland: the Jannus Brothers Company. It operated a flying school, performed exhibitions and planned the construction of a new flying boat. The new flying boat was completed by Ericson during the winter of 1914-15.

In May 1915 Tony Jannus joined the Curtiss Company and took charge of the design team at the new plant in Toronto, Canada. Ericson joined him here as well, although he did not feel like moving to Canada. He submitted an unbelievable high demand for wages and reckoned that it would not be accepted. But much to his surprise the demand was met, hence Ericson had to move to Toronto as well.<sup>30</sup> The factory was opened in 1915 and the airplane produced at the Toronto plant were Curtiss JN-3s. They were delivered to the British Royal Naval Air Service. Near the factory a training school, the Curtiss Aviation School, was opened that fell under the responsibility of Roger Jannus.

When the British were looking for a bomber, they asked Curtiss to reconstruct the Curtiss H-4 flying boat as a landplane. As the factories in Hammondsport and Buffalo did not have any capacity left, the Toronto factory was asked to take on the job. In May 1915 the prototype of the Curtiss C-1 Canada bomber was ready and on September 3, the first flight took place.<sup>31</sup> This was the first twin-engine airplane to be built in Canada, the first airplane of Canadian design to go into production, the first Canadian designed bomber and the first Canadian design intended for military service.<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately the performance of the Curtiss C-1 Canada bomber proved to be poor and all production airplanes, except twelve already delivered, were cancelled. Now the Curtiss plant in Toronto was out of work and its personnel had to be released.

Already in April 1916 Rosto had started to work for the Curtiss Aeroplane & Motor Co. In September 1916 he was in Duluth in connection with his petition for American citizenship and it was here he met Ericson who was in Duluth for a family

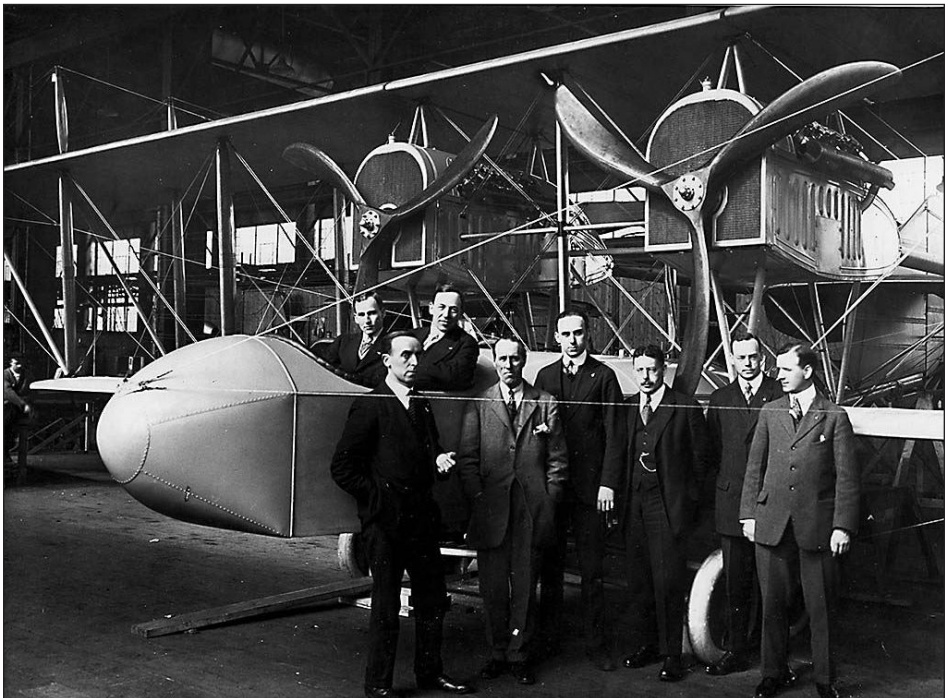
visit. At that time Rosto lived at the Holland Hotel in Duluth. Rosto immediately applied for a job as mechanic at the Curtiss plant in Toronto. A few weeks later he was given the job and was to come to New York to receive his final instructions. Instead, he was asked to go to Russia and assist with the assembling of Curtiss airplane there. Departure from New York was set on December 9.

In September 1916, the Swedish Baron Carl Cederström, his chief pilot Carl-Gustaf Krokstedt and Folke "Ulla" Winbladh travelled to New York and visited Curtiss in Hammondsport and Buffalo. The baron obtained license rights for his airplane factory Nordiska Aviatikbolaget (Nordic Aviation Co.). The baron wanted to produce the NAB 12, which was to be the first twin-engine airplane in Sweden. In addition the Swedish Navy was asked to purchase the Curtiss Twin JN and the Curtiss K flying boat. It cannot be denied that Rosto met the baron in Buffalo during the visit to the engine production line. During the baron's stay in New York, he visited the Swedish Restaurant *Skandia* and enjoyed Scandinavian food in the U.S.A.

### **Was Rosto ever in Russia?**

In 1914 the First World War broke out and Russia became involved as it had

*In May 1915 the prototype of the Curtiss C-1 Canada bomber was ready and on September 3, the first flight took place. (Via Alvin Grady)*



guaranteed for the safety of the Kingdom of Serbs where the war had started. As war progressed, the Russians were in need of aviation equipment. Curtiss had developed the Model K from the Model F flying boat. It had many improved features and was powered by a 150hp Curtiss V-X engine. The Model K did not sell well in the USA, but Curtiss managed to sell a number of airplanes to Russia. On February 25, 1915 the Russian Imperial Navy placed the order for two Curtiss H-4s. On June 28, this order was changed to two “big flying boats” and by late September 1915 this was changed once more to an order for two Curtiss H-7TBs. The flying boats were sent by Curtiss on April 10, 1916 and both were delivered to Sevastopol (Black Sea) by July 7. It was not until September 22 that Tony Jannus made the first flight in Russia. Unfortunately the air frame was considerably damaged upon landing.<sup>33</sup> During 1915 sixteen employees had travelled to Russia under the leadership of Curtiss’ chief engineer of the Canadian factory, Tony Jannus<sup>34</sup>. They were a mix of pilots and mechanics that were to train Russian naval personnel<sup>35</sup>. There was one single Curtiss Model K briefly used by the branch of the Petrograd Naval Flying School in Baku, Azerbaijan. Hence, no airplanes from Curtiss were stationed or stored in Petrograd. On October 12, 1916, Tony Jannus had been killed, while testing a Curtiss flying boat above the Kruglaya Bay at Sevastopol (Black Sea, Russia). On board were also 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant A. Kasatkin, Petty Officer I. Kutsiev and Seaman A. Slonevsky. Witnesses stated that Jannus made a too short turn, lost speed, entered a spin and because he was at a low altitude, crashed into the Black Sea. Only 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Kasatkin survived and Jannus body was never found. This ended the Curtiss adventure in Russia.<sup>36</sup>

Rosto said in post-war interviews that he had been in Russia in December 1916, was arrested during the Russian revolution at the end of February 1917, escaped captivity, traveled to Finland and continued from there to France/England. Further he claimed that upon arrival in France and England, he had joined as a pilot on flying boats patrolling above the English Channel and along the French West Coast hunting for German submarines. This means he would have done all these things in the period December 9, 1916 – May 4, 1917; on May 4, he left Christiania by ship for New York, where he arrived on May 17. There are two memories that make it look like that Rosto traveled to Russia and Petrograd anyway (legally or illegally). His step-grandson Walter Cramer recalled: *“I don’t personally remember Oliver speaking about Russia, but my mother did tell me about his telling her stories about visiting there and getting caught up in the revolution... One thing that stood out was his bribing a soldier with his watch to save his life. I also remember her telling me that Oliver talked about all the blood running down the streets from the butchery. My mother said that Oliver didn’t necessarily enter Russia legally...”*

Another story comes from Mrs. Arue Beaulieu Szura. Rosto told her also a story about Russia: *“He did share with us one story about his visit to Russia in 1917. He said he was driving along a back country road when he noticed a small café in a farmhouse and decided to stop for dinner. The meal he ordered was delicious; that is, until he noticed*

*how tiny the bones were in the meat and questioned the cook about the bones. The cook puffed out his chest in pride and said the dish was the speciality of the house: home grown white mice!*"

As previously mentioned, in November 1916 Rosto returned from Duluth to New York. There he was told that he did not have to travel to Russia as the deal with this country was cancelled. But nevertheless, Rosto would travel, all be it not to Petrograd. He would also not leave for Canada either as in December 1916 the British had taken over the Curtiss plant in Toronto and dismissed all personnel, except Frithiof Erickson. Upon his return from Norway Rosto would continue to work as assistant chief inspector under Lynn Blankman. At that time Blankman was working for the British War Office and inspected the construction of the seaplane order the British Government had placed at Curtiss. Rosto became his assistant and they later moved to the Curtiss Engineering Corporation at Garden City, Long Island<sup>37</sup>. These inspections were vital to the British. The main purpose was to assure that the work done by the workers on behalf of the factory was executed in accordance with regulations and specifications. The knowledge Rosto had accumulated during his years as car mechanic and builder of the Rosto Monoplane paid off in this job. It looks like he had found his mission in life.

Since Rosto already had applied for a passport and permission to leave the country, he decided to travel to Norway for the holidays. On his application document he wrote that he would leave for Bergen on the S.S. *Burford* on December 9, 1916. The reason for his visit was "*visiting my parents who are aged and infirm*" and the only country he wanted to visit was Norway.<sup>38</sup> Indeed he left New York on December 9, 1916, for Norway.

But what happened to the Rosto Monoplane, "Duluth No.1"? When he learned he might have to leave for Russia, he moved his monoplane from "The Auditorium" for storage at the YMCA-building in Duluth. Unfortunately that was the last he ever saw of the airplane. The YMCA has no record of what they did with it. Rosto returned after the First World War to pick up his monoplane, but it was gone.<sup>39</sup>



*The YMCA building in Duluth, where the Rosto Monoplane was stored. When Rosto returned to get it back it was gone. (Author)*



He started his return voyage from Kristiania on May 4, 1917 on board the S.S. *Oscar II* and sailed back to New York, where he arrived on May 17.<sup>40</sup> He returned from New York to his residence at 213 West Utica, Buffalo, New Jersey.

During the summer of 1917 he decided to join the U.S. Navy as Assistant Inspector of Engineering Material, Aeronautics. They had their office at 2000 North Elmwood, also in Buffalo. In order to be able to do that he had to pass an exam that showed his skills. On the application form he had to swear that the information supplied was the truth. Going through his application really shows that Rosto had a thorough knowledge of mechanics. He had an impressive record. He stated that he had already worked for one year as assistant chief inspector at the Curtiss Company, at the Austin Plant on Austin Street in Buffalo under Lynn Blankman and was at the time of his application working as such, but now at the Curtiss Engineering Company at Garden City, New York State. He hoped to get a position at the earlier mentioned office of the U.S. Navy at Buffalo. Here he had been recommended by Lieutenant N. W. Seafield and Ensign R. A. Fisher, both stationed at the U.S. Navy office at Buffalo.<sup>41</sup> He passed the exam and on August 23, 1917 his selection was approved. Oddly enough he did not enter service until May 17, 1918. He became Assistant Inspector of Engineering Material, U.S. Navy under P. J. Pricirilli<sup>42</sup>. At the Austin Street plant at Buffalo, the Curtiss Company was doing U.S. Navy work including contracts for the British Government. In 1916 the U.S. Army Air Service submitted a large order for the Curtiss JN-4 "Jenny", while the U.S. Navy Air Service ordered the seaplane version, called the N-9. Thousands were sold to the air forces of the United States, Great Britain and Canada. The Buffalo plant employed no less than 18,000 workers making it the largest airplane factory in the world! One of the employees was Rosto, who worked for the Canadian and British Government inspecting the construction of their airplane. Later, Rosto was transferred to the Curtiss Engineering Company at Garden City to do inspection work on the engines. Here too, the famous NC-4 was produced. By the end of the First World War the Curtiss Aeroplane & Motor Company had built 2,000 seaplanes and over 15,000 engines.<sup>43</sup> Many of them were inspected by Rosto and his fellow inspectors.

On October 7, 1918 Rosto received orders from his superior P. J. Pricirilli that he was to transfer to Rochester, NY and report to the works of Rochester Motors Inc. and Kellogg Manufacturing Company<sup>44</sup> for such inspection duty as was necessary<sup>45</sup>. He was still in Rochester when the Armistice came into effect on November 11, 1918.

In April 1917 the United States entered the First World War. As mentioned the Curtiss plant produced thousands of airplanes for both the navy and the army and it is unbelievable how production rose, taking into consideration that it had just been eight years ago Glenn Hammond Curtiss gained fame during the air show at Reims in France. But with the signing of the Armistice, the Allied reduced or cancelled their orders dramatically. This, of course, also meant, that personnel was redundant and staff had to be laid off in considerable numbers. Consequently fewer inspectors were

needed. Civilian employed personnel were urged to resign their post and so Rosto did. On December 14, 1918 Rosto send a short letter of resignation to the Inspector of Engineering Material, Aeronautic, U.S. Navy: "*In view of the contemplated reduction of the personnel of the above office force, resultant from the signing of the armistice, I hereby tender my resignation as Assistant Inspector of Engineering Material, Aero., USN., to take effect Wednesday, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1919. Signed O. A. Rosto*"<sup>46</sup> On January 2, the Navy Department in Washington received his resignation and confirmed it one week later. The letter was followed by a letter of recommendation. In this letter his superior, P. J. Pricirilli, wished to take the opportunity to express the appreciation of the services which Rosto had rendered during the War Emergency. He continued: "*Your work has been faithful and satisfactory in every respect, and it is the spirit you have shown which has helped the Allied nations to successfully meet and defeat the Central Powers. The acceptance of your resignation in no way reflects upon the character of your work, but the termination of the National Emergency has made necessary a reduction of forces*"<sup>47</sup>.

For the first time a note about the career possibilities for Rosto was mentioned. On a personnel card at the office of the U.S. Navy, dated November 2, 1918: "*Rated ineligible for Aeronautical Engineer, but eligible for Aeronautical Inspector*".<sup>48</sup>

## **Flying or Not?**

After his resignation from the U.S. Navy, Rosto started to look for other work. But before going in depth it is important to tell a little bit more about the activities he claimed to have done during the years 1919 – 1928. He had told a journalist in a newspaper article in a short sentence what he had done in the period after 1919: "*...after which he went into the export business*"<sup>49</sup>. In another Norwegian article he informed the reporter that after his return to the USA after the war "*...joined the American air force, where I remained until 1927*"<sup>50</sup>. In a later letter regarding his retirement (1951) it was also mentioned that his civilian flying before his employment in the Government service (as per July 16, 1928) did not count<sup>51</sup>. So that means that he must have done some civilian flying before he joined the Department of Commerce in 1928. In 1962, Rosto informed the Early Bird Association that between 1919 and 1923 he had done some barnstorming<sup>52</sup>. Barnstorming was a kind of entertainment, where stunt pilots would perform tricks with airplanes, either alone or in groups. Barnstorming was the first major form of civil aviation in the United States. The term barnstorming comes from an earlier American tradition of rural political campaigns. Usually these flights were operated from farmer's fields.<sup>53</sup> The airplane used were surplus military biplanes, mainly of the type Curtiss JN-4 "Jenny". There were no national regulations, so the pilots could do just about what they wanted to. Those active in barnstorming also performed other not always legal flights, such as smuggling booze from Canada to the US, during the prohibition times. One should not be surprised if Rosto did so too.

There is actually a proper confirmation about his (official) work in the period 1919-1923. It comes again from a passport application. Rosto mentioned that he was employed at a company by the name of Lindsay-Fuller Inc. Exporters, based at Rochester, New York State. This company was formed by R. B. Lindsay, G.G. Fuller and F.H. Parker, all residents of Rochester. The firm was in the commercial business and had its office in Rochester, NY. Between 1919 and 1923 Rosto was employed as their European representative. Rochester was where Rosto had his last work for the U.S. Navy back in 1918. His job involved doing commercial export business on behalf of that company. He got the position most likely thanks to his ability to speak several languages, among them Norwegian. One of his first trips to the Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden and Denmark) started in New York around April 14, 1919<sup>54</sup>. His stay in these countries ended in June 14, when he started his return from Christiania to New York on the S.S. *Bergensfjord*. It must be noted that he had a New York address: 109 Broad Street, New York, NY<sup>55</sup>. This address seems to be an office address, as it was in downtown Manhattan. Just two months later, on August 15, 1919, he again left New York for Christiania and arrived there on the 26<sup>th</sup>. He was to travel around and find new business opportunities for his employer. He needed the passport to be valid for Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, France, Italy, England and even China!<sup>56</sup> On this trip he had brought a car to drive through Europe finding new business opportunities. In February 1921, he extended his passport and had to go to the American Consul General in Christiania, where he delivered his application on February 28.

Well-known is the story of Rosto in Norway dating from September 1920<sup>57</sup>. As mentioned, his employer had sent Rosto to Europe and a green 1914 Pierce-Arrow 38C2<sup>58</sup> automobile was shipped along. Both arrived in Christiania and Rosto got the idea to drive to Hellandsjøen to visit his relatives. Despite the bad road conditions between Orkdal and Hemne, Rosto arrived at his destination without any major problems. It was reported that this was the first arrival of a car in Hemne. One day, a Sunday in September, Rosto drove around in the Stølan-Dalem area in Hemne, when a local stood along the road looking at the green car about to pass him. Rosto halted and talked with the local offering him a ride. The man agreed and with his wooden shoes he sat down on one of the passenger seats in the car. Rosto drove up to Dalemskjølen and upon arrival he asked his passenger if he wanted to get out, since he had to walk back on his simple wooden shoes. But his passenger declined and instructed Rosto to drive on. He said he had enough time left of the weekend, so he was in no hurry.

When Rosto arrived in Hellandsjøen people gathered around this modern vehicle. It was said that even the sick got up from their bed to have a look at the car. The horse drivers were not impressed at all and shook their heads. The car only frightened the horses. The young kids were more than interested. On the way back to Christiania Rosto was joined by family as well as the famous Norwegian motor cyclist and later car dealer Bjarne Wist (1894 – 1989) from Trondheim. He drove all the way back to



*When Oliver Rosto worked for Lindsay-Fuller Inc., Exporters, he was sent to Europe and was allowed to take along a green 1914 Pierce-Arrow 38C2 automobile. (Via Hemne Bygdemuseum)*

Christiania. He had some *experience* in aviation, but this was only of short duration. He bought a crashed military seaplane, restored it together with two friends.<sup>59</sup> The airplane had crashed in Lade (near Trondheim) in February 1920 and Bjarne Wist brought it to Steinkjer to the workshop of O. I. Iversen. With the help of Petrus Aalberg they repaired the seaplane and in the summer of that year they took it to the sea to try it out. They had not the intention to fly. Soon they discovered that the center of gravity was wrong, so Aalberg had to sit on the tail. The test runs went much better then and they soon reached a speed of 100 kph. But it seems that one of the cables to the rudder was wrongly connected. When they wanted to turn starboard the seaplane responded differently and before they knew it the seaplane had tipped over, launching poor Aalberg in the air. Now, Aalberg was a well-known skier and he immediately took a ski jumping position and managed well on impacting the water. Wist fell in the water, but Iversen on the other hand got stuck in the wreckage. Fortunately he managed to get out before the seaplane sank to the bottom of the sea. Fortunate for them, there was a large crowd watching them and rescue was soon at hand. But they never flew again... at least not with that seaplane.<sup>60</sup>

During his stay in Christiania, Rosto fell in love with a girl, called Selma Rosette Elise Løvgren. She was born in Skjærstad (province of Nordland) on March 7, 1896 (some sources say 1895) and her parents were Henrik and Alethe Løvgren. In 1910, she was than only 14 years old and was already working as a maid. She met Rosto during his stay in Christiania started a relation and became pregnant. Their daughter was born on April 18, 1922, in Christiania.

She was named Ella. As the baby was very weak it was decided to baptise Ella

at the hospital. Oliver was present and it was registered that he stayed at the Hotel Bristol. Rosto had to leave Norway again and returned to the USA to pursue his career there, leaving Selma with their daughter back in Norway. In 1923, Selma married Hans Kristiansen, who adopted Ella as his daughter. Selma and Hans had another two children: Aud and John. Ella did not find out until her confirmation that Hans was not her biological father. But Ella regarded Hans as her father. When Selma told her daughter that Oliver Rosto was her biological father, she felt no need to contact him. The couple and their children lived at Narvik, where Hans worked for the LKAB (Luossavaara Kiirunavaara Aktie Bolag). This is a Swedish mining company with a mine at Kiruna and Malmberget in northern Sweden. Most of the ore is transported by train from Kiruna to Narvik in Norway, where it is shipped all over the world.

Ella grew up in Narvik, was active in the IOGT (temperance movement) as youngster and had splendid grades, but could not study at a university or similar due to lack of funds in the family. She worked as a secretary at a law office in Narvik. After 1945 she married Lundberg Martin Sandberg Langbakk Westerås and they had three children: the twins Henning-Even and Karl-Einar (born June 6, 1946) and Jan Hilmar Hans (April 2, 1949). Lundberg took Westerås as family name. The name comes from the farm, situated at Kalvåsen, 7 km south of Ballangen. Ella and Lundberg met in 1942 during a baptise ceremony, where both were sponsor. Lundberg said that he did not want to be a sponsor unless Ella, the little girl from Narvik, would be a sponsor as well. Lundberg escaped to Sweden during the war



*Above: Ella on May 17, 2011. (Lene Westerås)  
Right: Ella is the daughter of Selma Løvgren  
and Oliver Andre Rosto. She was born in  
1922. As she got older, she was told that Oliver  
was her father. (Hans Olav Løkken)*



and Ella waited for him to return. In September 1945 he returned and they got married. They built a house in Kalvåsen in 1954 and had a grocery store until 1966. Ella started to work for at the school office in Ballangen, where she worked until her retirement. Lundberg died of heart failure. Ella moved to Ballangen and is presently (August 2011) living at a nursing home at Ballangen. Before her health started to fail, she was very active in the pensioners' association making small dolls. She organized courses as well. She traveled a lot and organized numerous tours for the pensioners' association.

After the death of her parents she started to look for Oliver. She only had his first name on a piece of paper. She took it to the Salvation Army and asked for help. They found an article in a local historian book about a boy, who had moved to the USA and became a big guy there. She found out his name, where he lived, and the name of Evelyn Cramer came up, but she could not get hold of them until the internet made a better search possible. Assisted by her granddaughter Lene Westerås, they took contact with the 18-20 Evelyn Cramers they found in the U.S. telephone directories and asked them if they knew Oliver Rosto. They managed to find the correct Evelyn Heiserman Cramer and visited her in 1998. Ella also came in contact with Oliver's family in Trøndelag and visited them on several occasions.

### **Back to aviation**

But it seems that Rosto got himself a new job by 1923. In that year he returned to aviation again and took a position at the Ericson Aircraft Ltd. So, how did this company come into being and what kind of activities did the company exploit? Between January and May 1918 Frithiof "Fritz" G. Ericson made a tour through the Allied countries in Europe on behalf of the American government and investigated large airfields and airplane manufacturing facilities. After this tour he returned to Canada, where Ericson resumed his old position. He now worked on the construction of a flying boat for the U.S. Navy. But his desire was to transfer back to American aviation circles. In October 1918 he left Curtiss and took a month off. By the time he got back the First World War had been ended with the signing of the Armistice. He immediately traveled back to Toronto, met with the Canadian Government and started negotiations for the huge amounts of material which had remained unused at the factory. Ericson said he wanted to take over the whole stock and this surprised the authorities. He returned to the United States to find funds, which he located in Baltimore. He returned to the Canadian government and said that he wanted to purchase up to 500 airplanes and spare parts. Around Christmas 1918, he was ready to sign the agreement, when suddenly his financier from Baltimore died. Now without funds it was not possible to sign the agreement. But help came from a friend in New York, who said he wanted to buy forty airplanes. Ericson traveled from Baltimore to New York, met his friend and soon a new consortium had been put together. On January 23, 1919, Ericson purchased the British Air Corp's material



in Canada amounting to several hundred airplanes, spare parts, engines etc at a price of \$ 9,000,000.<sup>62</sup> The airplanes he bought were all of the type Curtiss JN-4 *Canuck*. The *Canuck* was basically a redesigned Curtiss JN-4 *Jenny*. This redesigning had been done by Ericson. They were given the name *Canuck* to distinguish them from the American built *Jennys*.<sup>63</sup> The number of airplane purchased might initially have been 500, but this figure seems to be far too high. Ericson kept at least 53 at Camp Borden, where he had set up a company named Ericson Aircraft Ltd. In 1919 numerous JN-4 *Canucks* purchased in Canada were transferred to the USA and put up for sale. But also in Canada, airplane were sold and used by the Canadian barnstormers.<sup>64</sup>

Ericson Aircraft Ltd. produced a three-seat version of the JN-4 *Canuck*. This airplane was known as the *Ericson Special Three* and was first offered for sale in the summer of 1919. After he managed to sell most of his airplane, he started to produce them as well.<sup>65</sup> In Baltimore he had a small plant and Ericson asked Rosto to become the plant manager. Rosto agreed and in 1923 he moved to Maryland and settled in Baltimore. His main job was inspector of airframes, engines and other raw material. In addition he did some test flying for the company and was involved in the improvements of the Curtiss JN-4 *Canuck*. In 1929 Ericson closed down his business. But already the year before Rosto decided to change jobs.

During his stay in Baltimore Rosto met the woman that would remain at his side for the rest of his life: Mary Garecht. Mary was the daughter of German immigrant Jacob Garecht (born in Germany around 1860-61) and Annie H. Garecht (born

*Oliver and Mary were married in Wichita on November 3, 1928. The ceremony was performed by Pastor L. H. Deffner of the Immanuel Lutheran Church. (Via author)*



in Pennsylvania around 1872). Jacob was a cigar maker and they lived in East Hempfield, Lancaster, Pennsylvania. On December 8, 1893 Annie gave birth to a daughter, which they named Mary. Mary grew up in East Hempfield and met local boy Warren Heiserman. He was born in 1894 in Pennsylvania and lived also in East Hempfield, Lancaster, PA.<sup>66</sup> They fell in love, married and on January 9, 1914, Mary had just turned 20, she gave birth to a daughter, who was given the name Evelyn. Warren died suddenly and by 1920 Mary (working as a stenographer) and Evelyn had moved into the house of Mary's parents. She remarried Guy Troop, who worked for the railroad and that took them to Baltimore. Following Guy Troop's death, Mary met Ross'. A little country girl from Landisville, PA was swept off her feet by this tall, handsome Norwegian and they were soon off on their adventure together. They met through a mutual friend. She did have a business school education and worked as a bookkeeper.

When Rosto changed positions and started to work for the Bureau of Commerce (see further on) he and Mary traveled to Wichita, Kansas, where they filed a marriage license on October 30. They were married here on November 3, 1928. The ceremony was performed by Pastor L. H. Deffner of the Immanuel Lutheran Church at 909 South Market Street, on the corner of East Indianapolis Street. At that time Rosto was 47 and Mary was 35 years old.<sup>67</sup> In 1930 Evelyn still lived at her grandparents' house. When she was a young girl her family moved to Landisville, where she lived until in 2003 when she moved to Homestead Village in Lancaster, PA. She attended Landisville schools and graduated from East Hempfield High School. She received her BS degree from West Chester University and her master's degree from Millersville University. She married Walter "Bud" Cramer at the Church of God. Mrs. Heiserman Cramer was employed by the Hempfield School District as a teacher for thirty years retiring in 1977. Evelyn Heiserman Cramer passed away peacefully on October 20, 2010 at Homestead Village.<sup>68</sup>

### **Working for Air Safety**

On May 20, 1926 U.S. President Calvin Coolidge signed the Air Commerce Act of 1926 into law. The act instructed the Secretary of Commerce to regulate civil aviation in the United States by issuing licenses to pilots and airworthiness certificates for airplane and major airplane components. In July a congressional joint resolution authorized the President to detail officers of the newly formed U.S. Army Air Corps to the Commerce Department to help promote aviation. William P. MacCracken was the first Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Aeronautics and he took office on August 11, 1926. He thus became the first head of the Aeronautics Branch created in the Department of Commerce by Secretary Herbert Hoover. The Aeronautical Branch made the first official airworthiness inspection of an American airplane when Inspector Ralph Lockwood tested a Stinson Detroiter before its delivery to Canadian Air Express on December 7, 1926. The year ended when on December 31 the first


UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
AERONAUTICS BRANCH

## PILOT'S IDENTIFICATION CARD

This Identification Card, issued on the  
1st day of Dec. , 1927, accompanies  
Pilot's License No. **131**  
Age 38  
Weight 162 Color hair Dark  
Height 6' Color eyes Blue

FORM AB-51 11-9637 U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE, 1926

*Oliver A. Rosto*  
Pilot's Signature.



Above: Rosto's Pilot's Identification Card # 131, issued December 1, 1927.

Right: Rosto's Transport Pilot's Licence, enabling him to fly transport aircraft.

PAGE 1 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AERONAUTICS BRANCH

FO. LICEN **131**

RE TRANSPORT PILOT'S LICENSE

Issued to **OLIVER A ROSTO**  
Date issued **SEPTEMBER 16 19**

Age 48  
Weight 170  
Height 6'  
Color hair **DARK**  
Color eyes **BLU**

*Oliver A. Rosto*  
PILOT'S SIGNATURE

This Certifies, That the pilot whose photograph and signature appear hereon is a Transport Pilot of "Aircraft of the United States." The holder may pilot all types of licensed aircraft, but may transport passengers for hire only in such classes and types specified in the accompanying Pilot's Rating Authority which is made a part hereof.

Unless sooner suspended or revoked, this license and rating authority expires as per pages 5 and 6 hereof.

ASSTANT SECRETARY OF COMMERCE FOR AER.



Below: Rosto's Identification card for the Civil Aeronautics Authority, dated January 31, 1939.  
(Via Alvin Grady)

Number **88** UNITED STATES Jan. 31, 1939  
CIVIL AERONAUTICS AUTHORITY  
WASHINGTON

This is to certify that  
**Oliver A. Rosto**  
whose signature and photograph appear hereon, is  
**Associate Air Carrier  
Inspector (Maintenance)**  
in the CIVIL AERONAUTICS AUTHORITY and is  
authorized to perform the duties of said office in  
accordance with the laws of the United States  
and the regulations of the CIVIL AERONAUTICS  
AUTHORITY. His authority will be respected  
accordingly.

*Alvin Grady*  
(Signature of employee)

FORM 38 TO BE SURRENDERED ON LEAVING THE SERVICE GPO 11-12160



Air Commerce Regulation of the Aeronautical Branch became effective. Pilots of licensed airplane were now required to hold private or commercial licenses.<sup>69</sup>

The first private license #1 was issued in the USA on April 6, 1927, to the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Aeronautics William P. MacCracken<sup>70</sup>. It was clear that Rosto needed a license if he wanted to continue flying. He started his formal education and on October 18, 1927, he passed his exam and received pilot's license number #131<sup>71</sup>. For him it was just a piece of paper. He had already flown since that cold February day in 1913 and at an early stage understood how to handle an airplane.

Meanwhile, on July 1, 1927, Clarence M. Young was appointed as Director of Aeronautics to administer the Aeronautics Branch under the general supervision of the Assistant Secretary for Aeronautics.<sup>72</sup> As business with the Ericson Aircraft Ltd was coming to an end and the Curtiss JN-4 *Canuck* was more and more difficult to sell, Rosto decided that it was time to start a new challenge. Being so close to Washington meant that he had access to interesting jobs and Rosto learned that a position as aeronautical inspector at Wichita, Kansas, was vacant. This sounded interesting to him as Kansas was the *Air Capital of the World*<sup>73</sup>. Thus Wichita was the place to be for someone as interested in aviation as Rosto was. On July 10, 1928 he received a letter of personnel recommendation from the Department of Commerce, Bureau Aeronautical Branch in which it was written that they had accepted his appointment as Aircraft Inspector at a starting salary of \$ 2,500 per year. His working area was "Aircraft in Commerce" and his appointment was effective on July 16, 1928.<sup>74</sup>

Wichita became the Air Capital of the World, thanks to its workers in the aviation business. In 1914-15 oil was discovered nearby and Wichita became the financial center for the oil industry. At the entry of the United States into the First World War, Clyde Cessna started up an airplane factory, where he produced the Cessna Comet. After the First World War more designers and constructors were drawn to Wichita, thanks to big investments and soon a new company, Swallow Aircraft Company, delivered the first of its Swallow biplanes. Lloyd Stearman and Walter Beech were both employed at Swallow Aircraft Co. They founded a new company together with Clyde Cessna: Travel Air Manufacturing Co. Soon afterwards Stearman left Wichita and Travel Air to form Stearman Aircraft in Venice, CA. Subsequently, Cessna left Travel Air and started Cessna Aircraft Company in January 1927. Stearman relocated his factory to Wichita. This varied airplane industry established Wichita as the "Air Capital". Travel Air, with Walter Beech at the helm, grew to over 600 employees and operated from a huge factory complex constructed a few miles outside the city from 1927 to 1929. Due to so many employees working at such a large complex, it was dubbed "Travel Air City" by Wichita residents. The company merged with the huge Curtiss Wright Corporation in the Roaring Twenties' heyday of company buyouts and takeovers just two months before the Stock Market crash in 1929. Workers were laid off by the hundreds during 1930 and 1931 and by the fall of 1932, the



remaining Travel Air employees were let go, the equipment was sold, and the entire Travel Air plant sat empty.<sup>75</sup>

Oliver Rosto traveled with his wife-to-be to Wichita and began his new job. He had been appointed federal airplane factory inspector and had his main office at the building of the Chamber of Commerce. He succeeded Major W. N. Breingan, who had been inspector in Wichita since May 12, 1928. The Major left Wichita to fill an advanced position of traveling inspector. Rosto had a short trial period and on September 17, "*his salary was adjusted and brought... to the minimum range which the*



*Left: Rosto became friends with both Charles Lindbergh (left) and Walter Beech (right). Lindbergh often flew in and out of Winchita.*

*Below: Felix W. A. Knoll sent this photograph of the Knoll KN-1 (first flight December 30, 1928) to Oliver Rosto, and included a personal note. (Both via Alvin Grady)*



*With best regards to my friend  
Mr. Rosto  
Felix W. A. Knoll*

*office desired to establish for this work.*<sup>76</sup> The new salary (\$ 2,600) became effective on October 1, 1928. Between 1928 and 1931 Rosto worked as an Aircraft and Engine Inspector. His duties were, factory inspector of aircraft and aircraft material at the following aircraft factories in Wichita:

- Travel Air Manufacturing Co;
- Stearman Aircraft Company;
- Swallow Aircraft Company; and the
- Cessna Aircraft Company.

The nature of his work was as follows: Rosto inspected raw material before it was made into airplane parts, inspected the different parts that were put into airplanes, and also before it was assembled. He also inspected during the final assembling, after which he gave the plane a test to see that it met all requirements, both in performance, air worthiness, and safety. After the airplane had passed all inspection, and met all requirements specified by the Department of Commerce, Aeronautical Branch, he would give the airplane its license. In addition he made out an inspection report and license form on the same. He then forwarded all papers pertaining to the license to the Chief of Inspection Section Aeronautical Branch, Department of Commerce in Washington D.C. It was quite a challenging job as he had to use most of his day time to perform factory inspections and write all his inspection reports during the evenings. Rosto said this about his work: *“Regarding factory inspection ...same requires very good judgment and diplomacy, but through my vast amount of experience in this line I believe my work is very satisfactory with the Department of Commerce as well as the aircraft factories here in Wichita”*. And he was right, because his boss, S. Buchwig (Chief Inspector), said about Rosto: *“He is a man who has had many years experience in the manufacture and maintenance of aircraft and must have diplomacy to retain the cooperation of the factories in maintaining airworthy standards”*. Rosto worked under the general supervision of the Supervising Inspector. Much of his work was done with practically no supervision. His immediate superior was H. A. Frese, Supervising Factory Aircraft Inspector.

Rosto's salary increased from \$ 2,600 to \$ 2,800 (January 1, 1929), to \$ 3,000 (July 1, 1929) and finally to \$ 3,100 (April 16, 1930). On September 1, 1931 his title was changed to Airline Maintenance Inspector and he was now responsible for the control of the aircraft maintenance at airlines. The Bureau was required to perform this duty for the safety of those flying on airlines. And Rosto was recommended to get this position. This job would not only take him to many places in the United States, but also to Norway, as will be explained further on. His job as inspector was basically to inspect material, pilots and airport lightning. The salary remained the same during the years 1931-1937, certainly due to the Depression. The Depression did not have an impact on the budget of the Aeronautical Branch until 1933. The reduction of its budget started in 1933 and lasted for some years<sup>77</sup>. By 1934 Rosto had moved from Wichita to 6811 Paxton Avenue, Chicago, Illinois along with his wife. His mother-in-law and Mary's 18-year old daughter Evelyn





*Another friend of Oliver Rosto at Wichita, Kansas was aircraft constructor Lloyd Stearman. He sent Oliver a signed photograph. (Via Alvin Grady)*

still lived in Lancaster, Pennsylvania<sup>78</sup>. In September 1933, Rosto's job was on the line. The Aeronautical Branch announced a streamlining plan for the Air Regulation Service, aimed at saving \$ 500,000. It reduced the number of inspection districts from nine to eight; cut personnel by fifteen percent; generally required applicants to travel to inspection locations as opposed to inspectors traveling from airport to airport; placed fourteen Department of Commerce airplane in storage; closed an aircraft maintenance base; and completely segregated airline inspection, licensing, and regulation services. Even the wattage of rotating beacon lights was cut in half in order to save about \$ 75,000 annually. The name of the Aeronautics Branch was changed to the Bureau of Air Commerce, as it was felt that the new name more accurately reflected the duties of the organization.

### **Trip to Norway and The World**

On June 20, 1935, President Roosevelt ordered the creation of the Interdepartmental Committee on Civil International Aviation. It was to gather information and make recommendations pertaining to civil international aviation.<sup>79</sup> Rosto was asked to make a tour around the world and visit several countries where he was to study civil aviation, airlines and airliner maintenance work. On April 10, 1936, the Department of Commerce, Bureau of Air Commerce issued a letter in which they introduced Captain O. A. Rosto, Airline Maintenance Inspector of the Air Regulations Division of the bureau. He was to tour Europe, Asia and India with the task of familiarizing himself with the maintenance and inspection procedures of various airlines and transport manufacturing concerns. At that time Rosto was 6 feet tall, weighed 172 lbs, had dark brown hair and blue eyes. Rosto had arrived in Oslo on April 24, 1936, by the S.S. *Bergensford* from New York. Here he met his friends Bernt Balchen and Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen. They both worked for Det Norske Luftfartselskap Fred. Olsen & Bergenske AS - DNL, (Norwegian Airlines, Fred. Olsen & Bergenske AS), a company founded in 1935 by ship owner Rudolf Olsen and a number of other Norwegian shipping firms. In April 1935, the Norwegian State awarded DNL a ten-year general concession to operate national and international air services. During the summer of 1935 DNL operated a trial service from Oslo to Bergen and from Bergen along the coast to the northern city of Tromsø. Service to the latter town was operated by the single-engine Junkers W 34hi, LN-DAB *Ternen*. The flight took 11 hours and 20 minutes. During the four weeks the service was operated, DNL carried 114 passengers and 1,000 kg of luggage and more important 5.8 ton of mail.<sup>80</sup> On June 7, 1936, DNL inaugurated the air service between Bergen and Tromsø with the larger seaplane version Junkers Ju 52/3m-See, LN-DAE *Havørn* (Sea Eagle). On board were Bernt Balchen and the chief pilot Finn Lambrechts. They had taken along Oliver Rosto, who had a chance to see his native country from the air. Ironically this seaplane crashed nine days later...

Beside a visit to Norway, Rosto continued by flight via Copenhagen to Amsterdam



*During a tour through Europe and China in 1935, Oliver Rost and Bernt Balchen flew the inaugural flight of air service between Bergen and Tromsø on June 7, 1936. This was only nine days before this particular aircraft crashed! Here Oliver Rost can be seen in the middle with a cigarette, after landing at Trondheim. (Via Alvin Grady)*

*Oliver Rost in 1936.  
(Via Alvin Grady)*



*Below: As inspector of the C.A.A., Oliver Rost was allowed to fly across the Pacific in the Martin M-130 Clipper. (Via Alvin Grady)*





*Rosto was added to a six-man CAA board headed by Raymond B. Quick that would put the new, huge Boeing 314 Clipper through its final tests. (Via Alvin Grady)*

and started from there his trip through Europe, including Leningrad and Moscow. He proceeded to the East to Tokyo and from there by Pan American Airways' Martin M-130 *Clipper* back to the USA. This despite the fact that the *Clippers* did not take any passengers along, a CAA air inspector would not be refused and Rosto was allowed to fly along. His trip to Europe, Asia and India had been a success and his report was well received. On January 1, 1937, he was given an administrative promotion and was then sent from Wichita, Kansas to Oakland, California<sup>81</sup>. He then became responsible for the area between Seattle in the north down to San Diego in the south, and had his base at an office on the Oakland Airport. Mary and Oliver Rosto rented an apartment on 886 Cleveland Street, Oakland, CA. This particular apartment was part of a larger building erected in 1928 and the couple moved in during the month of December 1936.

During the spring and summer of 1937 Rosto flew around the country doing his inspection work on United Air Lines' route network between San Diego and Seattle. After a less eventful, but busy year, the autumn saw a new challenge. Rosto was added to a six-man CAA board headed by Raymond B. Quick that would put the new, huge Boeing 314 *Clipper*, a 72-passenger, 82,000 pound flying boat, through



its final tests.<sup>82</sup> It would be possible to write several pages about this beautiful flying boat and the saga it turned out to be. But here, there is only space for a short description. The Boeing 314 Clipper was produced by the Boeing Airplane Company and was a long-range flying boat of exceptional class. It was designed for flights across the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. These *Clippers* were in a class of their own. They were sheer luxury for their passengers. Seats could be converted into bunks and there was a comfortable lounge and dining area. The dinners consisted of five and six course meals served by stylish waiters. The flying boat was constructed in two versions: Model 314 with 4x 1,500hp Pratt & Whitney Twin Wasp engines; and Model 314A with 4x 1,600hp Wright Double-Row Cyclone GR-2600-A2, additional fuel capacity and revised interior. Six of both models were built. The first flight of the Boeing 314 was made on June 7, 1938.<sup>83</sup>

Rosto said about the *Clipper*: “...It has been a challenging time ... with all these test flights. One has to be alert and concentrated at all times. These test flights ... showed that the new *Clipper* has all the qualities as the calculations showed... We are very pleased with the result. Especially outstanding for this *Clipper* is how easy it is to fly it. It weighs over 41 tons, but can be steered like a little sporting plane. One can control the machine with two fingers on the controls and the use of the rudders is very light and responsive.”<sup>84</sup> He continued and talked about the spacious flight deck, the easy access to the hull and wings for inspection and minor repairs. He also mentioned a Swedish journalist that his newspaper should not forget to mention that a Swede stood behind much of the drawings for the Boeing 314: Fritz Hammerberg. Since the start of the project he had been in charge of all of the drawings. After Boeing’s test program had been completed, the Bureau conducted an extensive test program. On January 26, 1939, the Approved Type Certificate for the Boeing 314 *Clipper* was issued<sup>85</sup>.

Besides work on the Boeing 314, Rosto was still involved in other work as well. On March 1, 1938 an incident occurred that would be known as the *1938 Yosemite TWA Crash*. It involved the Douglas DC-2-112, NC-13789 (c/n 1299), owned by Transcontinental & Western Air, Inc. (TWA). The airplane departed for a routine shuttle flight from San Francisco to Winslow. The Captain on board was John Graves, with C. W. Wallace as co-pilot. In the cabin were five passengers and the stewardess Martha Mae Wilson. The airplane encountered the beginnings of a weather front that would develop into the most severe storm on the West Coast in 64 years. Due to ice formation on the wings, Captain Graves decided to divert the flight to Fresno and this message was the last transmission received by air traffic control. The plane finally crashed. Harold Bromley, noted flier and Fresno inspector for the Bureau of Aeronautics, said that visibility in the Fresno area was practically zero because of the downpour. The search of the airplane started, but it could simply not be found. The initial search party included Rosto, but they simply could not find the airplane. The search had to be abandoned after a short time. TWA was desperate to find the airplane and offered a reward of \$ 1,000 (\$15,600 by today’s standards). Three months after the crash, 23-year old H. O. Collier hiked into

snowy terrain northeast of Wawona and found the crash site on June 12, 1938, in the Yosemite National Park. The airplane was buried in snow. The bodies of the occupants were still inside.<sup>86</sup> In the wake of the first search, Rosto received a letter from J. M. Johnson, Assistant Secretary of Commerce at the Bureau of Commerce: *“Dear Mr. Rosto, I am in receipt of a letter from Colonel Ruby D. Garrett, Attorney of Transcontinental & Western Air, Inc., complementing the representatives of the Bureau of Air Commerce for the cooperation which has been accorded that company in connection with the search for their airplane, license number NC-13789, lost somewhere northeast of Fresno, California, and missing since the night of March 1, 1938. Colonel Garrett has specifically mentioned your name and the splendid work which you have been doing in this connection. I want to tell you personally that I appreciate your effort and loyalty. Work which deserves compliments such as those given you by Colonel Garrett will go far toward increasing the prestige of the Bureau of Air Commerce in its work in fostering aviation.”*<sup>87</sup> This well-deserved compliment certainly put a big smile on Rosto’s face.

The year 1938 also brought another change in the organization Rosto worked for. On July 1 the Bureau of Commerce created a new field organization that decentralized administrative authority. Seven regional headquarters (Regions) were established at Kansas City (MO), Los Angeles, Newark (New York), Atlanta, Chicago, Fort Worth and Seattle. Each region was placed under the general direction of a regional manager responsible for a host of matters that had previously been the work of Washington officials. Oliver Rosto held the position at Seattle (7<sup>th</sup> Region, his former port Oakland fell into the 6<sup>th</sup> Region). In addition, on June 23, President Roosevelt signed the Civil Aeronautics Act of 1938 into law. It would not become effective until August 22, but it transformed the Bureau to a kind of Federal agency. A five-member entity designated the Civil Aeronautics Authority was created. The law also established an Administrator for the Authority, who was independent of the five-member Authority and had responsibility for the executive and operational functions of the agency. Finally, an Air Safety Board of three members operated independently within the agency.<sup>88</sup> On August 22 Rosto was transferred from the Department of Commerce, Bureau of Air Commerce to the CAA *“pursuant to Executive Order No. 7959, dated August 22, 1938”* as it was in official words. His position was still Airline Maintenance Inspector, Grade CAF Class 8 (CAF-8) at a salary of \$ 3,200 per year. A short time later on September 15 (effective October 1), there was another change to Rosto’s status. He worked now for the Bureau of Safety Regulation, Air Carrier Inspection Section. He was promoted from Associate Air Carrier Inspector to Air Carrier Inspector and came now under the salary scale Grade CAF Class 9 (CAF-9) with a starting salary of \$ 3,200 per year. Mary and Oliver had to move again. In December the Rostos moved from Oakland to Seattle and got an apartment at 1619 East John Street, Seattle, WA. In Seattle, where Boeing had its factory, Rosto became involved in the certification of the Boeing Model 307 *Stratoliner*. This was the first commercial transport airplane with a pressurized cabin. It was now possible to cruise at an altitude of 20,000 feet



(6,000 m). But Rosto's main job was to be Air Carrier Inspector. A little bit about the position: Basically one can say that an Air Carrier Inspector is an aviation-safety officer. He inspects airplanes and maintenance base facilities of the airlines to assure conformance with federal safety and qualifications standards. In addition he checks to see if overhauls are performed and flight logs were correctly filled in. Also the engines, wings, fuselage and landing gear are checked for damage or corrosion. His findings are put in a *Report of Inspection* that determines also if the Certificate of Airworthiness is issued or re-issued again.<sup>89</sup> Quite a responsible job and Rosto fitted just perfectly for this position.

## The War Years

In September 1939, war had started in Europe, but this had not too much effect on daily life in the United States. In December 1939, and at the direction of President Roosevelt, a new reorganization was scheduled for the Civil Aeronautics Authority. The plans were set up by a committee and in the spring of 1940 it was presented to the President. They were accepted on April 11, and on June 4 the plan was implemented (Joint Resolution of June 4, 1940 – Public No.75 – 76<sup>th</sup> Congress). The authority was split into two agencies: the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) and the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB). The CAA was responsible for air traffic control, safety programs, and airway development. The CAB was entrusted with safety rulemaking, accident investigation, and economic regulation of the airlines. On June 30, 1940 Rosto was transferred to the CAA. Two weeks later, he got a new boss in Washington as well, when Colonel Donald H. Connelly was sworn in as the new Administrator of Civil Aeronautics.

The CAA-personnel were constantly reviewed and Service Rating Forms were required for each employee. On this form the *Quality of Performance* (acceptability of work; thoroughness; general dependability; accuracy, neatness and orderliness of work, skill with which the important procedures, instruments, or machines are employed in performing his duties), *Productiveness* (amount of work accomplished, application of time, interest, and energy to duties; industry; promptness in completing assignments; speed) and *Qualifications Shown on Job* (knowledge of duties and related information, ability to learn and to profit from experience, judgment, sense of proportion, common sense; initiative and resourcefulness, cooperativeness; ability to work with and for others) and in the reports found about Rosto it can be read that he scored “very good” on basically all reports. Both his Rating Officer and Reviewing Officer were of the same opinion. The CAA was more than content with the duties Rosto performed for them.

On August 1, 1941, the CAA added a new region, the Eighth, to its organizational structure. The region covered the territory of Alaska, with headquarters at Anchorage. Prior to this time, Alaska fell under the Seventh Regional Office in Seattle, WA. Rosto travelled regularly to Alaska and usually flew on the Pan American's Sikorsky



*Oliver Rosto (left) was inspector of Pan American Airways' routes to Alaska. He regularly flew in the company's Sikorsky S-42B, NC16735 "Alaska Clipper". (Via Alvin Grady)*

S-42B, NC-16735 *Alaska Clipper*. Within Pan American Airways, Rosto was well acquainted with such high-ranking men as Colonel Clarence M. Young (in charge of the Pacific Division), Andre Priester (Chief Engineer, based in New York) and John Leslie (Operation Manager Atlantic, stationed in New York). It was no problem for him to obtain airline tickets (paid by the CAA) when needed. Thus, Rosto had the opportunity to fly as a passenger in many different airplane and he did so. Occasionally he flew an airplane himself. Up to February 27, 1941 he had flown a total of 2,080 hours. That year he had flown 30 hours, and the last 36 months 127 hours. It was important for him to keep up with the development of airplanes. In addition he had a mechanic and aircraft engine mechanic certificate (No. M-15325) and had taken numerous technical courses to keep up with technical development.<sup>90</sup> Quite an accomplishment for a 60-year old aviator.

On June 1, 1941, Rosto was submitted for promotion. He then became a Senior Air Carrier Inspector (Maintenance), salary grade CAF-10 and his salary increased to \$ 3,500 per year. He was informed accordingly.<sup>91</sup>

With the outbreak of the Second World War, Rosto could be called in for military service. When he first arrived in the USA he had joined the Wisconsin National Guard. But in 1930 he reported to the U.S. Army Air Corps where he obtained the rank of Captain in the U.S. Army Air Corps Reserve<sup>92</sup>, Material Division, Procurement Section on October 13, 1935. On December 7, 1941 the Japanese attacked Hawaii and the Philippines and the following day the U.S. Congress declared a state of war with Japan. On December 11, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. In May 1942, Rosto was required to appear before his local draft board for registration and classification under the provisions of the National Selection Service Act.<sup>93</sup> He was not recalled to active duty and not assigned to any combat duty. He would eventually retire from the U.S. Air Force Reserves at the rank of Colonel in 1950<sup>94</sup>.

Days went by and another salary raise was coming up. On January 1, 1943, Rosto had its salary increased to \$ 3,600 per year and was then appointed to the Bureau

for Safety Regulation, Air Carrier Branch, still at Seattle, WA. “*His efficiency rating was good and the service and conduct of Mr. Rosto had been satisfactory. He was therefore eligible for within grade salary advancement under the Mead-Ramspeck Act*” as it was written down officially.<sup>95</sup> But his days in Seattle were numbered now. A new transfer was coming up. In February 1944, Rosto was asked to move back to Oakland and have the same position there as in Seattle. On April 1, the couple returned to Oakland and settled on 2447 Montana Street, in Oakland, CA. His working field became the Oakland Airport, just eight miles from his home.<sup>96</sup>

To help out, Rosto was asked to make a temporary move again and take a similar position at the Santa Monica Airport (CA) which he did from November 1, 1944 until December 16, 1945. The position was subject to restoration of another employee from temporary duty outside the continental United States. When he returned to Oakland, he was assigned to Pan American Airways, Inc.<sup>97</sup> By now the Second World War had ended in both Europe and Asia. The CAA returned to normal duty, but again an extensive reorganization was announced (in May of 1945) to meet the urgent problems, domestic and foreign, of post-war expansion of civil aviation. In June 1946 the CAA announced streamlined inspection procedures intended to prevent bottlenecks in the extensive civilian airplane production underway. The new procedures provided for appointment from the industry of designated manufacturing inspection representatives and designated maintenance inspectors. By June 30, 1948, 9,965 representatives of the Office of Aviation Safety were under training.<sup>98</sup> What did Rosto do after the War?

### **Foreign Field Service**

Rosto had two salary raises in 1945-1946 and his wages had now increased to \$ 6,144.60 per per year.<sup>99</sup> But a more interesting job was coming his way. On July 10, 1946 the CAA announced plans to establish nine new foreign offices during the next year. The location selected included Paris, London, Cairo, Shanghai, Sidney, and Mexico City. These came in addition to the three foreign offices already in service: Lima, Rio de Janeiro and Balboa (Panama, Canal Zone). Rosto was asked to move to London. For the 65-year old aviator this looked like a new challenge and he accepted the post of Air Carrier Inspector (Maintenance). He was transferred to Washington D.C. and from there sent to the Field Office in London, England (UK). His division became now the Safety Regulation Aircraft & Components Service, Scheduled Air Carrier, Maintenance Division (Foreign). The effective date was October 20, 1946.<sup>100</sup> He did not travel right away as he had to finalize some work in Oakland. Until he came to the UK, all matters were dealt with by Everett E. Keeler, the CAA representative in Paris and a friend of Rosto's. Besides the domestic things connected with moving, he also had to undergo a medical examination. This was done on December 16-17 and showed that he was still in good health. Also the x-ray examination concluded with that the “...*employee may be retained*

*on duty without contingency*”. He was healthy enough to travel to England. But also the FBI checked him out. In the report Rosto’s nickname can be found. It seems that Rosto was sometimes called “Ross”. Mary and Oliver moved to London and got an apartment at 64 Clarewood Court, W.1 in London. The apartment was in a seven story building and not too far from the U.S. Embassy, where he had his office. His work in London was not limited to England. He became a consultant for the coordination of international air services in Europe and was constantly traveling around in the CAA’s Beechcraft aircraft. By far the Model 18 used in the largest numbers by the CAA/FAA was the AT-7C (the military designation). At least 62 AT-7C models were transferred to the CAA in 1946. Some were sent to Oklahoma City where they were dismantled and a large inventory of spare parts was assembled. Several F-2 Photographic versions were used, as were C-45, C-45A, C-45D, C-45F, AT-7, & JRB-4 models. In England the following airplanes were operated:

<b>Type</b>	<b>c/n</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Registration(s)</b>
Beechcraft C18S	4089	AT-11	N16443, N200
Beechcraft C18S	4778	AT-7C	43-33281, N12, N4, N47
Beechcraft C18S	6029	AT-7C	43-33511, N101, N66, N95, N995L
Beechcraft C18S	6597	AT-7C	43-50029, N178, N63, N99, N11199 <sup>101</sup>

Besides flying around Europe inspecting, Rosto was also responsible for issuing temporary Certificate of Airworthiness. Rosto could also issue the necessary papers for the transfer of former military airplanes to Europe for use by either civilians or airlines. The problem was actually that the military airplanes did not necessarily possess an original Certificate of Airworthiness. The permit issued by Rosto was valid for those flights across foreign territories which were necessary for the airplane to reach their destination and might also be submitted as a substitute for the original certificate required by all countries before renewal. Operators in the United Kingdom had to obtain a British Certificate of Airworthiness on the permit which was to be issued after the CAA inspector (Rosto) had been satisfied that the necessary modifications had been effected and that the airplane was airworthy. Enquiries were to be made through the Civil Air Attaché at the American Embassy at Grosvenor Square in London, where Rosto had his office.<sup>102</sup>

His work at the office of the Civil Air Attaché was reviewed in April 1947 by two local representatives and the Report of Efficiency Rating was again “Very Good”. The reviewers especially noted the following points:

- Attention to broad phases of assignments
- Accuracy of final results
- Accuracy of judgments or decisions
- Effectiveness in presenting ideas or facts

- Effectiveness in meeting and dealing with others
- Cooperativeness, resourcefulness and dependability.

Many other points were highlighted as “outstanding”, but these points showed exactly the moral Rosto had to his job.<sup>103</sup> A year later a similar report rated him again “Very Good” and Mr. A. F. Heeley, chief Scheduled Air Carrier Maintenance Division and Charles F. Young, Director, Aircraft & Components Service highlighted basically the same points as in the report the year before.<sup>104</sup> Looking at his salary and compared with other employees, Rosto (in May 1948) had the third highest salary. He received a salary of \$ 6,348 per year.<sup>105</sup> His two-year assignment in London passed, but was extended by another two years. In August 1949, his superior in Washington, Al Koch sent a letter to the Personnel Officer that Rosto had been stationed in London beyond the required two years and should be able to return within a reasonable time. Mr. Koch proposed Rosto for the position of Air Carrier Maintenance Inspector, location San Francisco, California.<sup>106</sup> Unfortunately for Rosto he had to remain in London. But possibly, Rosto liked it as well. He had officially only two years left before he was 70, the maximum age for retirement within the CAA. So, he remained in London until his retirement. But he was still eager to learn. Between August 22 and September 2, 1949 he attended a training course about electrical systems, electrical accessories and instruments and came out with the grade “Very Good”. The instructors Emil A. Bjorkman and Alan R. Kenison noted especially “*His long experience background enabled him to discuss problems, and give history of electrical equipment*”<sup>107</sup>. Rosto just had it in his finger tips and learning something new was for him no problem.

### **Towards retirement**

But Rosto also knew that he was to retire. Officially he would retire on August 31, 1951. He turned 70 the week before and the paper work for his retirement had already started by then. In April 1951 his salary was adjusted for the last time and he then received \$ 7,200 per year. It was also made known that he would separate from the service on August 31, 1951 and that he would be entitled to an annuity of \$ 1,944 per year commencing September 1, 1951, with benefit to his widow after his death of \$ 1,044 per per year. But Rosto did not want to stop working. He requested to get an extension of his service in London for six months and this was granted. He would receive the same salary, but an amount of \$ 1,944 per year was deducted (as this was paid as his retirement fund). He kept his title of Air Carrier Maintenance Inspector. His last performance report before retirement was made on July 31, 1951 by his superior Roland Sturtewart and now his rating was “satisfactory”.<sup>108</sup> His appointment for another six months was not given just like that. From the correspondence it seems that Rosto thought he could continue working without any problem. Although no written notice was given 60 days in advance, Rosto was handed the necessary forms for automatic retirement over 90 days before the date of





*From left to right:  
Roland Sturtevant, Mr.  
E.A. Lister (Air Attaché  
London), Colonel Oliver  
Rosto and SAS-director  
Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen.  
Photograph taken in  
connection with the  
handing over of the  
CAA Certificate to the  
workshop at Fornebu.  
(Via Alvin Grady)*

retirement at which time he was informed verbally regarding their completion. This fact plus Rosto's submission of completed application for retirement were acceptable evidence for the personnel officer handling his case. Officially, he had to retire on August 31, 1951.<sup>109</sup> But as his temporary appointment was approved, Rosto could remain another six months in London.

During these last months, Rosto continued his inspection work and made headlines in Norway as well. After handing over CAA Certificates to the workshops of KLM in Amsterdam/Schiphol and to Scandinavian Airlines System – SAS in Copenhagen/Kastrup, it was then time for Rosto to leave for Norway and hand over such a certificate to the workshop on Oslo/Fornebu. On Wednesday, February 20, 1952 and at a formal ceremony the CAA presented to SAS a CAA Certificate to the workshop at Fornebu. Such a certificate is a stamp of quality and a solid proof that the work which is carried out at the workshop is of the highest international standard. On the occasion of the presentation, Roland Sturtevant and Colonel Oliver Rosto, both representing the CAA, and the American Air Attaché in London, Mr. E. A. Lister, had come to Oslo. Several hundred workers and office personnel were assembled when Director Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen was presented with the certificate by Mr. Sturtevant in one of the hangars at Fornebu. The certificate was passed on to the Technical Superintendent, Mr. Henrik W. Ree, and they thanked CAA's representatives for the testimony. Notable was that within the technical staff in SAS, Region Norway, there were also three Norwegians who had individual CAA Certificates: Eimund Søyland, Peter Wessel and Alf Grimsøe. Of these Søyland had a general certificate for overhaul of all civil airplane types, but the two others had

certificates for engines. Six other SAS authorized mechanics were at that moment preparing to take this highly esteemed certificate.<sup>110</sup> This was the last recorded official representation of Rosto in CAA service. On March 3, 1952 he was retired, when his temporary employment was terminated. On April 2, 1952 Mary and Oliver boarded the S.S. *America* in Southampton to sail back to New York, where they arrived on April 8<sup>111</sup>.

In the magazine of the employees of the Civil Aeronautics Club (named CA News) it was written (extract): “*Retirement of Oliver Rosto from the CAA after 25 years service and at the age of 70, does not please him. He has informed his young friends in the CAA who have been flying only 35 years that he is looking for another job. Such veterans fliers as George Haldeman, John Morris, Al Koch, John Sommers, Wiley Wright, Jim Kinney, all of them flying in 1917 and 1918 and who are still at it, take back seats before Rosto, who built his own plane in 1909 and learned to fly it the same year (112). Now that he has finished a five year hitch as Aeronautic Adviser in the CAA’s International Region Office at London, and has received the last extension possible on the “compulsory 70” rule, he finds the years of activity will be missed. His appearance belies his 70 years, and his attitudes towards life and activity cast a doubt on the rule requiring retirement*

*Retirement party in Washington. From left: Freeman Alberry, CAB; Wiley Wright, CAA, Jesse Lankford, CAB, A S. Koch, Administrator CAA’s International Region: Oliver Andre Rosto, CAA, James L. Kinney, CAA; Robert Hoyt, CAN; and George Haldeman, CAA. (Facsimile from CA News, via Alvin Grady)*





Civil Aeronautics Administration  
Certificate of Merit

Awarded to

Oliver Andre Rosto

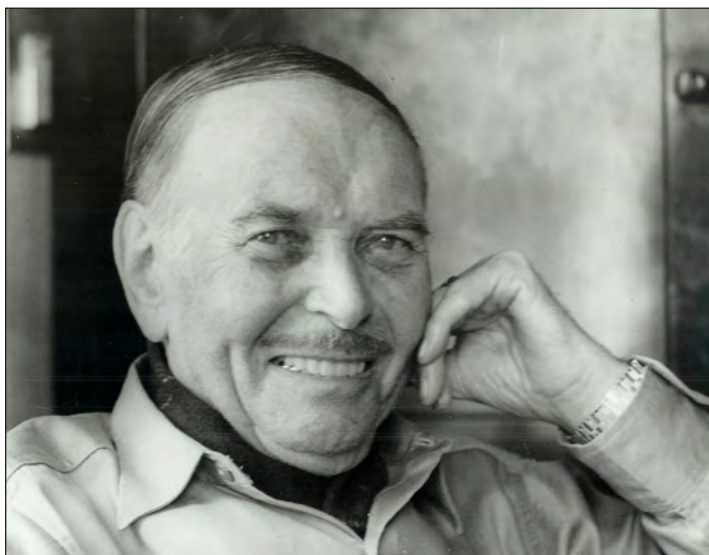
in recognition of his twenty five years of faithful service to the United  
States Government, and his many contributions to civil aviation.

Washington, D. C.

March 3, 1952

Administrator, International Region

*When Oliver Rosto retired he was awarded the Certificate of Merit in recognition of his twenty five years of faithful service. (Via Alvin Grady)*



*A charming man  
in Norway in  
1952. (Via Alvin  
Grady)*

*at 70... At a celebration in the office of the Administrator of the International Region recently old timers gathered and paid Rosto honor. There was much remembering of the old days, but the guest of honor topped all stories with the account of his trip to France where he saw the Bleriot monoplane in flight. Returning home, he decided he could build such a plane too...*<sup>13</sup>

On March 3, 1952, he was awarded the Certificate of Merit from the Civil Aeronautics Administration in recognition of his twenty five years of faithful service to the United States Government, and his many contributions to civil aviation. For Rosto this was a proud moment during his retirement party in Washington.

The couple continued on to Oakland and found their new home at a house on 337 Lenox Avenue. They rented one of the floors. The house was built in 1910 and counted eight bedrooms and two baths. The Rostos occupied one of the floors. Soon they would move to 491 Staten Avenue, just a few hundred yards from Lenox Avenue, where they would live until Oliver's death in 1972. But he was far from ready to quit working...

### **Working for Transocean Air Lines**



In 1907, Orvis Marcus Nelson, son of Marcus and Mamie Nelson, was born in Tamarack, Minnesota. His father was born in Grimstad, Norway, but immigrated with his parents to

the USA at an early age. They settled in Tamarack and Marcus became storekeeper. Orvis learned to work hard while helping out his father in the store. He became interested in aviation after Charles Lindbergh's solo flight across the Atlantic to Paris. The U.S. Army Air Corps was the first stop in his flying career and he graduated from Chanute Field, Illinois. Later he did some aerial photography in rented Waco's and old Travel Airs. During the Depression he returned to the U.S. Army Air Corps and graduated from training at both Kelly Field and Randolph Field. The military was not his business, and in 1935 he decided to resign and start work for United Air Lines (UAL). He worked for UAL throughout the Second World War flying for the Air Transport Command under a UAL contract. In 1944 he and many other pilots moved to Minnesota-based Northwest Airlines. During his time there he flew the company's Douglas C-54 Skymasters (militarized DC-4s) from San Francisco to the islands of the South Pacific. During a stop-over in Okinawa (Japan), Orvis came to talk with Sid Nelson, Harry Huking and Sherwood Nichols. They saw a potential in Japan and reasoned that it would take a while before the Japanese would be allowed to have an airline again. It could be a good idea to set up a Japanese airline themselves. The airline would have the name Orvis Nelson Air Transport Company. He made contact with United management. They were not interested, but United's "Pat" Patterson wrote a letter of introduction to General Douglas MacArthur, the commander in charge of the reconstruction of Japan. Unfortunately, the general



thought it was too early to set up an airline in Japan, as the peace treaty was not yet in place.<sup>114</sup> In 1946 Nelson started up an airline under the name of Transocean Air Lines that would operate until it went bankrupt in 1960. The founders had more dreams than money in their pockets, but eventually Transocean Air Lines became the largest supplemental air carrier in the world. At its height, the Transocean organization included 10 companies. The airline itself employed 2,200 persons. Including the personnel of its subsidiary companies, the total number exceeded 6,700. Transocean's gross annual sales climbed as high as 50 million dollars. By April 1958, after 12 years of business, Transocean's airplane had flown a total of 1,290,966,900 passenger miles, 126,990,642 cargo ton-miles, and 66,828,237 airplane miles – the equivalent of more than 135 round-trips to the moon.<sup>115</sup> After Rosto's retirement from the CAA, he applied for a job at Transocean Air Lines. There is not too much known about neither his engagement nor his job description. He entered service around April 1952 and seems to have worked there throughout the eight remaining years of the company. What we know is that he worked as *inspector*. In 1955 he worked as liaison representative for Transocean Air Lines' subsidiary Aircraft Engineering & Maintenance Company - AEMCO. During the Russian blockade of Berlin, AEMCO overhauled the forty-five Douglas C-54 Skymasters and later other airplanes<sup>116</sup>. AEMCO overhauled, one hundred Lockheed T-33 aircraft each month under an Inspect and Repair as Necessary contract during 1958 and 1959. This was done on AEMCO's moving overhaul line at Hangar 5 at Oakland<sup>117</sup>.

Transocean Air Lines transported cargo for the military to Europe and signed a contract with Scandinavian Airlines System – SAS for a U.S.-European cargo service in 1952<sup>118</sup>. Transocean flew the service for SAS<sup>119</sup>. But Transocean also flew for Braathens SAFE, the other airline of Norway. During one of these cargo flights



*Honored for his service to world aviation, Oliver Rosto was given the Silver Medal of Distinguished Service. From left to right: James S. Beasley (CAA), George Rounds (CAA), Orvis M. Nelson (Transocean Air Lines) and Rosto himself. (Via Alvin Grady)*



Rosto flew to Norway, where he was to visit some relatives. On his way over he sat on fishing material and upon arrival at Sola Airport, Stavanger, he met a Norwegian journalist of the *Stavanger Aftenblad* (Stavanger Evening News), who interviewed him at the Strand Hotel at Sola. Beside a short description of his life, Rosto added that he had come over in a Braathens Douglas DC-6 and said he landed "... on the best airport in Europe".<sup>120</sup>

On October 7, 1955, Rosto was asked to come to the office of no less than Orvis Nelson. When he entered the office, he saw very much to his surprise James S. Beasley, Director of the CAA's International Region in San Francisco. Beasley was joined by George A. Rounds, also a CAA official. On behalf of Mr. F. B. Lee, CAA Administrator in Washington D.C., Oliver Andre Rosto received for distinguished service to world aviation the *Civil Aeronautics Administration Silver Medal for Distinguished Service*, the first to be awarded on the Pacific Coast and one of the few in the U.S.A. Beasley said: "*As international representative of the Civil Aeronautics Administration in Europe from 1946 through 1953, you advanced world aviation and international goodwill by carrying through programs involving the safety of the United States and international carriers performing United States air commerce abroad and stimulating United States technical development. Further, you conveyed America's aviation concepts and operation practices to the extent that your personal efforts saved European countries years and years of developing their programs of services*".<sup>121</sup> This was another proud moment in Rosto's life. The event was widely published in both U.S. and Norwegian newspapers.

The last confirmed date for his employment known is November 15, 1958, where it is mentioned in the Reno Evening Gazette that Rosto worked for Transocean Air Lines at Oakland, California.<sup>122</sup> The end of Transocean Air Lines in 1960 was also the end of the aviation career of Oliver Rosto. He had now reached the age of 79 and it was about time to retire and enjoy the last days of his life. He would, however, continue flying a private plane, although not his own.

## The Flying Years

- 1 *Louis Blériot et son douze prototypes*, Gérard Hartmann
- 2 *Minnesota Aviation History 1857-1945*, Allard and Sandvick, page
- 3 *Minnesota Aviation History 1857-1945*, Allard and Sandvick, page
- 4 *Curtiss Airplane, 1907-1947*, Peter M. Bowers, page 60
- 5 *Curtiss Airplane, 1907-1947*, Peter M. Bowers, page 60
- 6 *Curtiss Airplane, 1907-1947*, Peter M. Bowers, page 106-107
- 7 Newspaper article *Duluth Man Builds Monoplane of New Type*, The Duluth, March 29, 1912
- 8 Plaque at the Smithsonian Museum of Flight, Washington, U.S.A.
- 9 Newspaper article from *The Duluth News Tribune*, March 29, 1912
- 10 Newspaper article from *The Duluth Herald*, January 21, 1913
- 11 Application for a passport, dated June 14, 1920 and extended on June 4, 1921 at Christiania, Norway
- 12 *The Trønder Oliver Rosto built his own plane and became a pioneer in aviation in the USA*, undated article, possibly from after 1945
- 13 *U.S. Navy, Application for examination for profession, scientific, or technical positions*, April 1919
- 14 *Minnesota Aviation History 1857-1945*, Allard and Sandvick, page
- 15 *Minnesota Aviation History 1857-1945*, Allard and Sandvick, page
- 16 Advertisement from *Duluth Trade News*, 1910, page 166
- 17 Article in the *Duluth Herald*, 1911
- 18 Newspaper article from *The Duluth Herald*, January 21, 1913
- 19 Newspaper article from *The Duluth News Tribune*, March 29, 1912
- 20 Newspaper article from *The Duluth News Tribune*, March 29, 1912
- 21 Article in the British magazine *Flight*, October 30, 1909, page 676
- 22 *The Duluth Herald* of January 21, 1913
- 23 *The Duluth Herald* of February 27, 1913
- 24 *The Duluth Herald* of February 27, 1913
- 25 Undated article from the Pan American Airways magazine *The Clipper* (possibly September 1944)
- 26 Article named "Timeline of civil aviation" on [www.europeanairlines.no](http://www.europeanairlines.no)
- 27 Newspaper article "*All want to name monoplane*" in the Duluth News Tribune, June 28, 1913.
- 28 Newspaper article "*Det Lille Intervju*" in *Aftenposten*, May 24, 1951.
- 29 From <http://earlyaviators.com/eericson.htm>
- 30 From <http://earlyaviators.com/eericson.htm>
- 31 See [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curtiss\\_c-1\\_Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curtiss_c-1_Canada)
- 32 <http://www.ch2a.ca/Welcome100th.html>
- 33 E-mail from Stig Jarlevik to author, dated April 22, 2010
- 34 *Curtiss Airplane, 1907-1947*, Peter M. Bowers, page 106-107
- 35 *Curtiss Airplane, 1907-1947*, Peter M. Bowers, page 106-107

- 36 *Curtiss Airplane, 1907-1947*, Peter M. Bowers, page 106-107
- 37 *U.S. Navy, Application for examination for profession, scientific, or technical positions*, April 1919
- 38 Application for a passport, dated October 30, 1916.
- 39 E-Mail from Alvin Grady, dated July 14, 2010.
- 40 Ship's passenger list, dated January 27, 1917
- 41 *U.S. Navy, Application for examination for profession, scientific, or technical positions*, April 1919
- 42 Letter of acceptance of resignation, dated 10 January 1919
- 43 From website [www.glennhcurtisismuseum.org](http://www.glennhcurtisismuseum.org)
- 44 A car manufacturer, source: Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan.
- 45 Travel orders from the Inspector of Engineering Material, Aero. USN to O. A. Rosto dated October 7, 1918.
- 46 Letter of resignation dated December 14, 1918.
- 47 Letter from the Inspector Engineering Material, Aeronautic, U.S. Navy to O. A. Rosto, dated January 10, 1919
- 48 Small card with information about U.S. Navy history of Oliver A. Rosto found in the National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO.
- 49 Newspaper article with the title "*Them were the days! Plane built here 31 years ago*" supplied by O. A. Rosto and dated December 8, 1939. Name of the newspaper is unknown, but likely a newspaper from Oakland.
- 50 "*Det lille intervju*" (The short interview) from the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten*, dated May 24, 1951 supplied by O. A. Rosto.
- 51 Letter from Department of Commerce, Civil Aeronautics Administration to Oliver Rosto, dated April 24, 1951 and signed by Bill.
- 52 Letter from O. A. Rosto to E. A. (Pete) Goff Jr, dated March 6, 1962
- 53 [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)
- 54 Application for a passport, dated March 27, 1919
- 55 S.S. Bergensfjord's manifest "List of United States Citizens".
- 56 Application for a passport, dated June 14, 1920 and extended on June 4, 1921 in Christiania, Norway
- 57 Article: *Oliver A. Rosto – Norskamerikaner og flypioner fra Røstøya*, in the *Årbok for Fosen*, 1993
- 58 From the AASA-forum and the Packard-forum: The convex curve of the headlight projection was used that year only in the Teens. It is a 38-hp (calculated hp), known as a 38C2, per the headlights being higher than top of the radiator. Larger cars available that year was the 66A2 and the 48B2. The 38C2 had a six-cylinder 4 x 5.5 bore and stroke engine, rode on a 132-inch wheelbase, and weighed 4300 lbs.
- 59 Article: *Oliver A. Rosto – Norskamerikaner og flypioner fra Røstøya*, in the *Årbok for Fosen*, 1993.
- 60 Article: *Oliver A. Rosto – Norskamerikaner og flypioner fra Røstøya*, in the *Årbok for Fosen*, 1993.

- 61 Several e-mails between Lene Westerås, granddaughter of Oliver Rosto, and the author 2009-2011
- 62 From <http://earlyaviators.com/eericson.htm>
- 63 *Curtiss Airplane, 1907-1947*, Peter M. Bowers, page 144-145
- 64 See *Canadian Airplane since 1909*, by Molson & Taylor, page 228
- 65 See *Canadian Airplane since 1909*, by Molson & Taylor, page 230
- 66 U.S. Federal Census of 1920
- 67 Marriage license of Oliver Andre Rosto and Mary Troop dated October 30, 1928
- 68 From: <http://obits.lancasteronline.com/index.php?f=2598937>
- 69 FAA Historical Chronology, 1926-1996 (<http://www.faa.gov/about/media/b-chron.pdf>)
- 70 FAA Historical Chronology, 1926-1996 (<http://www.faa.gov/about/media/b-chron.pdf>)
- 71 Copy of Rosto's flying license issued on October 18, 1927 with number # 131.
- 72 FAA Historical Chronology, 1926-1996 (<http://www.faa.gov/about/media/b-chron.pdf>)
- 73 [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)
- 74 Personnel Recommendation for Oliver A. Rosto, dated July 10, 1928
- 75 Extract from [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)
- 76 Personnel Recommendation dated September 17, 1928 and signed by Clarence M. Young – Director of Aeronautics.
- 77 FAA Historical Chronology, 1926-1996 (<http://www.faa.gov/about/media/b-chron.pdf>)
- 78 Department of Commerce, Bureau of Office Aeronautical Branch: Report of Employees' Marital Status and Dependents.
- 79 FAA Historical Chronology, 1926-1996 (<http://www.faa.gov/about/media/b-chron.pdf>)
- 80 From the book "*Ternen - Junkers W34hi, LN-DAB – DNL's første trafikfly, 1935-1946*", page 13, 18-21.
- 81 Personnel Recommendation, dated December 18, 1936.
- 82 Article from Cheyenne-based newspaper titled "Colorful Pioneer in Aviation Spending Few Days in Cheyenne".
- 83 [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)
- 84 Newspaper article from unknown Swedish newspaper, dated April 8, 1939.
- 85 From *Pan American's Ocean Clippers*, page 167
- 86 [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org) and newspaper article *Airliner Disappears – Nine Aboard*, in the Ogden Standard Examiner, Utah, March 2, 1938
- 87 Letter from Bureau of Commerce, by J. M. Johnson to Oliver A. Rosto, dated March 25, 1938.
- 88 FAA Historical Chronology, 1926-1996 (<http://www.faa.gov/about/media/b-chron.pdf>)
- 89 From [www.job-descriptions.org/air-carrier-inspector.html](http://www.job-descriptions.org/air-carrier-inspector.html)
- 90 Application for Employment, dated February 27, 1941
- 91 Letter from Department of Commerce, CAA to Chief Division of Disbursement, dated May 24, 1941.
- 92 Certificate from the President of the United States of America presented to Oliver Andre Rosto, where he was appointed Captain, Specialist of The Army of the United States. Dated October 13, 1935 and part of the papers left behind by Oliver A. Rosto.

- 93 Notification from Major General Joyce dated May 16, 1942.
- 94 Information supplied by Alvin Grady.
- 95 Letter from Department of Commerce, CAA to Chief Division of Disbursement, dated February 10, 1943.
- 96 Letter from Department of Commerce, CAA to Chief Division of Disbursement, dated February 26, 1944.
- 97 Letter from Department of Commerce, CAA to Director of Personnel, dated October 14, 1944 and December 26, 1945.
- 98 FAA Historical Chronology, 1926-1996 (<http://www.faa.gov/about/media/b-chron.pdf>)
- 99 Letter from Department of Commerce, CAA, Santa Monica to Director of Personnel, dated July 25, 1946.
- 100 Letter from Department of Commerce, CAA to Director of Personnel, dated October 7, 1946.
- 101 E-mail correspondence with Dave Welch, June 12, 2011.
- 102 Flight, November 20, 1946, page 600 and 602
- 103 Report of Efficiency Rating dated April 1, 1947 and for the period September 29, 1946 – March 31, 1947
- 104 Report of Efficiency Rating dated March 31, 1948 and for the period April 1, 1947 – March 31, 1948
- 105 Review from the Office of General Counsel, effective February 22, 1948.
- 106 Office Memorandum, dated August 15, 1949, from A.S. Koch to Personnel Officer, Washington, W-91
- 107 Record of Training, Curriculum Part A2(1) for Rosto, Oliver A., September 1949
- 108 Employee Performance Rating Report of August 17, 1951.
- 109 Request for Personnel Action, no. 114144, dated May 1951.
- 110 Aftenposten, January 24, 1952 and Morgenbladet, January 24, 1952.
- 111 List of in-bound passengers from the S.S. *America*, dated April 8, 1952
- 112 See earlier in this chapter about the correct dates and events.
- 113 CA News, Volume 6, No.4, April 1952, published by the Civil Aeronautics Club, for CAA and CAB employees.
- 114 From: <http://www.taloo.org/index.html>
- 115 From: <http://www.taloo.org/index.html> and [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org).
- 116 From: <http://www.taloo.org/index.html>
- 117 From: <http://www.taloo.org/index.html>
- 118 From: <http://www.taloo.org/index.html>
- 119 From: <http://www.taloo.org/index.html>
- 120 Nordisk Tidende, August 23, 1956 and an undated article from the *Stavanger Aftenblad* found in the Rosto-folder at the NAMS.
- 121 Newsletter from the Oakland Chamber of Commerce, Publicity Department, dated October 8, 1955.
- 122 Article “*Old Time Airmen Tell of Exploits*”, in the Reno Evening Gazette, November 15, 1958.





# Not Giving Up

It has not been possible to find the exact date or year when Oliver Rosto retired, but as mentioned in the previous chapter, it looks like that he worked for Transocean Air Lines until it went bankrupt in 1960. The wages were of course a nice supplement to the pension he received from the Government.

During his life time Rosto joined several clubs and associations. He visited them regularly. After his final retirement, he attended their meetings as often as he could. Especially *Ye Ancient and Secret Order for Quiet Birdmen (QB San Francisco Hangar)* was among his favorite clubs. Here are some of the clubs and associations he was a member of. No information was found about the *Over 50 Club*.

## **The Norwegian Club, San Francisco**

The Norwegian Club was set up by Norwegian immigrants when it was rumored that the famous Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen would come to San Francisco. Some residents decided to form a group with the name *Den Norske Klub Fram* (named after the ship that Nansen used). Nansen's visit was cancelled, but the group continued to meet and soon numbered one hundred members. Many dignitaries, who visited San Francisco came to the club as part of their visit. People like Roald Amundsen and Andrew Furuseth were among those visiting the club. World famous Thor Heyerdahl (know from the Kon Tiki expedition) came too. As the club writes: The Norwegian Club was organized for the primary purpose of providing for the furtherance and advancement of Norwegian culture and interests, to foster incidental social functions, and to carry on the high traditions and principles of *Den Norske Klub Fram*.<sup>1</sup> During his stay in San Francisco, Rosto first joined the local Norwegian Club (1900 Fell Street) in the late 1930s and would eventually become an honorable member. Rosto visited the club on many a Thursday evening. He presented the club a souvenir of his flying days in the form of a large propeller, which still has a conspicuous place above a doorway. The propeller was presented by



*On August 25, 1938, Captain Rosto presented the Norwegian Club a metal propeller. (Rob Mulder)*



Rosto on August 25, 1938 (on his 57<sup>th</sup> birthday). It was a metal propeller into which he had mounted two airplane gauges: an air speed and an air temperature indicator. The club regards the propeller as a special memorial to Colonel Oliver Rosto.<sup>2</sup>

### **National Aeronautic Association**

Rosto was a member of the *National Aeronautic Association*. It is the oldest national aviation organization in the United States (started in 1905) and is a non-profit association. The NAA is “*dedicated to the advancement of the art, sport and science of aviation in the United States,*” according to its mission statement. The core of the organization is its membership; thousands of individuals, numerous organizations, and corporations representing all segments of American aviation. NAA encompasses all areas of flight from skydiving and aircraft model building to commercial airlines, military aircraft, and spaceflight.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Early Birds of Aviation, Inc**

Together with the *Quiet Birdmen* and the *OX5 Club*, the *Early Birds of Aviation, Inc.* belongs to the world’s oldest clubs for aviators. The *Early Birds of Aviation, Inc.*



*Logo of the Early Birds of Aviation, Inc. The Early Birds of Aviation is the world’s oldest clubs for aviators. (Via Alvin Grady)*

was founded in Chicago in December 1928 and its aim was to preserve the history of aviation and, in particular, the history of aviation before the First World War. They initially called the group the “Association of Old Time Airmen,” the “Old Timers” and the “Early Birds.” A letter sent to prospective members read, in part, “*There is a move foot among the old fliers to organize – and this move has crystallized into the formation of the tentative organization of the “EARLY BIRDS” or “OLD TIMERS” – open only to those who actually soloed prior to the outbreak of the war.*” – so, membership was limited to those who could provide evidence that they had soloed in any aerial craft, lighter-than-air or heavier-than-air, prior to December 17, 1916, the thirteenth anniversary of the first flights of an aeroplane, by Wilbur and Orville Wright at Kill Devil Hill, North Carolina. Many pioneer aviators either did not apply for membership in *The Early Birds*, or did not survive to apply for membership. The *Early Birds of Aviation* (and its legal successor, *The Early Birds of Aviation, Inc.*) was to go out of existence once the last living member had passed away. With the passing of 99-year-old Early Bird George Debaun Grundy, Jr., on May 19, 1998, *The Early Birds of Aviation, Inc.*, ceased to be.<sup>4</sup> The name of Oliver Andre Rosto is listed on the wall commemorating the Early Birds at the National Air & Space Museum in Washington, D.C. It is not known when Rosto became a Member. The date of his first solo flight has unfortunately not been confirmed by a reliable source (see early explanation in this book), but he soloed well before December 17, 1916 on February 26, 1913. Rosto’s early aviation efforts will not be forgotten.

In the past, Early Birds held an annual dinner called the “Kitty Hawk Day”. It is known that Rosto attended this event between the years 1958 and 1970. During this annual dinner event representatives of military and civil aviation commemorated the historic 1903 flight of the Wright Brothers. It was an invitational dinner and Rosto attended at least on the following evenings:

December 5, 1958 – Held at the *Mart Club*, 1355 Market Street, San Francisco;

December 11, 1959 – Held at the *Mart Club*, 1355 Market Street, San Francisco.

The dinner was sponsored by the San Francisco Bay Area Chapter of the *National Aeronautic Association* and all *Northern California Aviation Organizations*;

December 16, 1960 – Held at the newly opened *Jack Tar Hotel* at Geary Boulevard, corner Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco;

December 15, 1961 – Held at the *Del Webb’s Towne House Hotel*, at Eight Street, San Francisco.

At this meeting the 80-year old Rosto was presented with the plaque which contained the following text: “*Commemorating the first solo flight of Oliver A. Rosto made on November 15, 1909 awarded by The Early Birds – an organization of pioneer aviators who flew solo before December 17, 1916.*”<sup>5</sup> Hillery Beachey also received his plaque on this occasion. He was born in 1885, brother of the famous aviator, Lincoln Beachey. Like many an early aviator, he started his aviation career flying balloons. He flew a dirigible at the Lewis & Clark Exposition in Portland, Oregon in 1905. Hillery Beachey was among the first six men in the United States to successfully



*Plaque from the Early Birds of Aviation, Inc. given to Oliver Andre Rosto on December 15, 1961. (Via Alvin Grady)*

*From left to right: Harry Christofferson, Anthony Stadlman, Stanley Hiller and the two who received their plaque: Oliver Andre Rosto and Hillery Beachey. (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)*





fly in a circle with an airplane. He took his test flight for F. A. I. Airplane Pilot's Certificate #89, on January 10, 1912, at St. Louis, Mo., and was issued his license one week later, on January 17, 1912. He powered his new tractor biplane, sporting raked rear wings, with a 6-cylinder Kirkham motor. Several years after suffering a stroke, he died in a California State Hospital, on July 22, 1964.<sup>6</sup>

December 11, 1964 – Held at the *Hilton Hotel*, San Francisco;

December 3, 1965 – Held at *Goodman's*, 10 Jack London Square, Oakland;

December 19, 1969 – Held at *Fort Mason Officers Club*, Building 1, Bay & Franklin Street, San Francisco;

December 17, 1970 – Held at the *Red Knight Restaurant*, San Francisco.

There is no record of the 1971-meeting and Rosto likely did not participate. In the between years, Rosto did not participate when the meeting was held at a place other than in the San Francisco area. Rosto simply could not afford to.

Many well known Early Birds attended these events, among them men like Robert G. Fowler, Cleve T. Shaffer, Harry P. Christofferson, Dana C. DeHart (one of U.S.A.'s first civilian airmail pilots, 1886 – 1975), Stanley Hiller and Hillery Beachey.

## The OX5 Aviation Pioneers

The OX5 Aviation Pioneers were organized in 1955 at Latrobe, Pennsylvania for this purpose: "*To compile and record in detail the historical and educational history of the development of air transportation. To perpetuate the memory of pioneer airmen and their great sacrifices, accomplishments and contributions to the development of civil aviation and to do honor to all pioneers in aviation, especially those associated with the OX5 engine.*" Rosto was a qualified member, having soloed, flown, owned or actively and directly participated in the design, construction, repair or operation of OX5 powered airplanes prior to December 31, 1940. Oliver Rosto became a member quite late in his life, probably in the period of 1967-68. At that time Arthur Goebel was president and Rosto's certificate was signed by Goebel and club secretary Clifford Ball.<sup>7</sup> It must be noted that Rosto's close friend Lars Lind was also a member of the club.

## Silver Wings



Silver Wings' originally known as Angel Flight, had a specific objective of supporting the mission of the Arnold Air Society. Silver Wings is committed to developing strong civilian leaders with an understanding of aerospace power. As specified in the Silver Wings National Constitution, Silver Wings (SW) is a national, co-ed, professional organization dedicated to creating proactive, knowledgeable, and effective civic leaders through community service and education about national defense.<sup>8</sup>

# Certificate of Membership



THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

## Oliver Rosto

IS A QUALIFIED MEMBER OF THE  
**OX5 CLUB OF AMERICA**

AVIATION PIONEERS

having soloed, flown, owned, or actively and directly participated in the design, construction repair or operation of OX5 powered aircraft prior to December 31, 1940.

Issued by authority of Board of Governors and the undersigned officers of the OX5 CLUB of AMERICA.



By *Arthur C. Sobel*  
PRESIDENT

COUNTERSIGNED

*Clifford Ball*  
SECRETARY



*Oliver Rosto was a qualified member of the "OX5 Club of America", having soloed, flown, owned or actively and directly participated in the design, construction, repair or operation of an OX5 powered aircraft prior to December 31, 1940. (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)*

## The Ancient and Secret Order of Quiet Birdmen



This is a more-or-less secret organization made up of men who are nominated by their peers in order to become members. Among the members were famous aviators such as Eddie Rickenbacker and Charles Lindbergh. It was originally formed in January 1921 at *Martas Italian Café* on 75 Washington Place, in New York City. The gatherings were anything but quiet. Very quickly *Mondays at Marta's* took on a life of its own as other aviators joined in. Around 1931, the number of aviators attending these informal gatherings became so great that Marta's ceased to be available. Soon other so-called *QB Hangars* were established around the country.<sup>9</sup> The activities ranged from monthly meetings to BBQs, Fly-Ins, excursions and evenings celebrating the "Old Timers". QB parties are known for their rowdiness and good fellowship.

Oliver became a member on May 1, 1939, and his QB number was 2367. His friend Lars Lind was introduced to the QB San Francisco Hangar by Oliver and Lars got QB number 14027. Lars was Glenn Plymate's sponsor in QB and it was through Lars that he met Oliver. That would have been around 1966. Glenn became a QB in 1969 and his number is 16574. Glenn was airport manager of the Oakland International Airport when he first met Oliver and Mary. He recalls from the QB-meetings: "*Before our monthly QB meetings in San Francisco, Mary would set out hors d'oeuvres in their apartment near Lake Merritt in Oakland and several QBs and guests would get together for drinks and snacks for a pre-meeting party. We almost always rode together to the meetings, usually in Lars's car, and brought Oliver home after the meetings.*"

Although retired, Oliver also had an office at the Oakland Airport, North Field where he kept in touch with friends, and Glenn gave him a place to park near the terminal so he didn't have so far to walk when he came over for lunch. He recalled Oliver as always chipper and having a good sense of humor. Glenn considered Oliver a real gentleman.

### Excursions

On the same day (October 7, 1955) Oliver Rosto received his *Civil Aeronautics Administration Silver Medal for Distinguished Service*, he was invited to a special event. By courtesy of Pan American Airways, forty-three guests would make a special flight in a Boeing 377 *Stratocruiser*. They had to meet at the V.I.P. room in the old PAA Terminal Building at San Francisco Airport at 6.30 p.m. On board, cocktails and hors d'oeuvres were served by hostesses. The flight was followed by a dinner at Villa Chartier in San Mateo. The captain of the flight was Captain Buckshot B. Lien (1911 – 1965). A description and a few remembrances of this flight: "...a wonderful and memorable flight in one of P.A.A.'s super duper stratocruisers. Plush? Well that is an understatement, believe me. This ship is luxury deluxe from the fittings to the low noise level in flight. As per usual the hoard began arriving with a lot of loud talking and lying about flying and some other things too. It was a pleasure to have Clarence Young make an appearance..." "...As the gang continued to arrive, more and



*Above: On October 7, 1955, Oliver Rosto (third from right) made a flight in the Boeing 377 Stratocruiser, N1036V, with his club members.  
Below: Oliver Rosto entertaining crew and guest after the flight. (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)*





more interesting personalities showed and signed in. Names appeared on the log that really spelled "Aviation" from its inception. For example two early birds, Bob Fowler and Art Hartman... .. and "Another famous name in aviation appeared, Captain Jack Tilton, he being the first P.A.A. captain to retire, after 27 plus years at the helm. Other important names in aviation to follow were those such as Oliver Rosto, Joe Dawson and Ed Pettis, while among the notable famous names missing were Frank Coffyn, Sammy Metzger, Harry Bruno and Jimmy Doolittle...". At about 1620 Captain Buckshot blew the whistle and called for all to board ship. There were 41 guests signed on. As we boarded, there were photographs taken of the group by none other than Lee Jones, the top photographer of Ames Laboratories...".

"...Guess what we were confronted with when we were received aboard; three of the prettiest and cutest hostesses that Pan Am has in the whole system. I am confident that down the line, from the youngest to the oldest man aboard, all present were airborne before the flight started, at the sight of these lovelies. After much scrambling and jockeying for seats..." "... everyone was tied in, the ship fired up and we began to roll away from the line."

"After the check list had been read off and answered, the mags, props and controls checked, Captain Phillips got the word to make like a bird from the tower, and Buckshot poured the smoke to those beautiful P&W corncobs. In a very short time we were airborne and started our normal climb to 10,000 feet, our assigned altitude. The Windy Gulch kids must be pure kids for the Great Creator gave us the most beautifully clear night that I have ever seen in my many years of flying around this country, clear as a bell and visibility unlimited. When we reached our assigned altitude we leveled off and headed for Sacramento, did a 180 around the city, back over SFO to Monterey and returned to SFO two hours later."

"Typical of P.A.A. efficiency and the complete way Buckshot arranges things, as soon as the seat belt sign was extinguished, another great surprise was experienced by the group. Our lovelies Libby Aldrich, the purser, Nancy Larson and Sue Mead, served some of the finest hors d'oeuvres to be washed down with champagne, scotch n' bourbon, for those who wanted it...". "Our "usherette" Captain Wernet and Second Officer Walts made a second security check and made certain that all hatches were battened down and secure so that we would have the same count on the completion of the flight that we did at the beginning".

"The cabin pressure was held at sea level pressure at all times during the flight although we were cruising at nearly two miles high. Well, as do all good things, our magnificent flight had to come to an end, before we used all of P.A.A.'s gas up, so typical of our sharp "driver" old Buckshot really greased her on. I'm not sure that Captain Phillips, Walts Wernet and Rathe didn't all help a little for there were 41 senior birdmen aboard closely watching and I am confident silently hoping that they would dribble at least a couple of times so they could razz them a little. After landing and deplaning, the "landing time" prize was awarded to good old Tex Davidson for having the closest number to the touchdown time."

<sup>10</sup> Everybody deplaned and moved to the Restaurant Villa Chartier at San Mateo where they were served the best roast beef dinner that any of them had devoured in



many a day. So that none would go away without a memento of this grand occasion each member and guest were presented with one of the most beautifully done pieces of art work and lithography on excellent paper. The colored cover sheet portrayed an old Clipper Ship in the ocean with a *Stratocruiser* flying above.

A similar meeting was organized on November 14 and 15, 1958, when a group of “old timers” traveled by Boeing 377 *Stratocruiser*, N1030V, from San Francisco to Reno, Nevada. This flight included eighty-six pilots and it was estimated that 2,650 aviation years and 500,000 hours of pilot flying time were aboard. In Reno a dinner and party was held at the *Holiday Hotel* and *Harold’s Club*, before the return flight to San Francisco the following day. The event did not go unnoticed by the local press and a long article was published in the *Reno Evening Gazette* of November 15, 1958.<sup>11</sup> A similar excursion with a Boeing 377 *Stratocruiser* was made the successive year (November 2 and 3, 1959). This time the event was held at the Riverside Hotel.

Every November the *Old Timer’s Nights* was held. A number of those who were advanced in age or had health problems normally attended this meeting while they were unable to attend other meetings. They usually were there to tell old stories from their colorful past.

*Oliver Rosto and the Quiet Birdmen traveled with the Boeing 377 Stratocruiser, N1030V from San Francisco to Reno. (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)*



## His Last Years

The humble apartment no. 16 on 491 Staten Avenue, Oakland proved to be a place which brought Oliver and Mary peace after Rosto's numerous trips around the world. At the age of eighty, Rosto still had a lean body, a small mustache and dark hair. He still had his high posture and his positively boyish smile. All his charms were still intact.

His whole life he was a notorious drinker and a blessing for the tobacco industry. Oliver and Mary smoked endlessly. At the age of 87 his doctor advised him *not* to stop smoking with as reason that it would kill him. His dear Mary had also a fearful experience while smoking. Their friend Lars Lind (more about him later) had picked them up from their home in Oakland for a benefit, where Rosto was the Guest Speaker. Mary was smoking a cigarette and looked for an astray, but could not find it. Believing she had found it, she pulled the car door handle and fell out of the car. Lars noticed Mary in the rear-view mirror in the road at rush hour in downtown Oakland with cars dodging her as she was tumbling to a stop! She wasn't hurt, although she skinned her elbow a bit and broke her bracelet which Lars would have repaired for her.

Lars Lind was a Swede, and along with his parents and three brothers, settled in Duluth, Minnesota in 1930. They came over by ship from Motala, Sweden. He became a personal friend of Oliver and Mary. At the time he met Oliver Rosto for the first time, Lind was flight inspector for Pan American Airways Ltd. He and Lars always had a great time discussing who was better – a Swede or a Norwegian! Lars Lind had an aircraft instrument and oxygen repair shop at Oakland Airport, CA (A.I.R. Corporation), where he invented a water detector to detect water in fuel. It soon become installed on all jet airplanes, as well as other aircraft including space shuttles and Navy Hovercrafts. Once Rosto was retired he often went on a fishing trip



*Mary and Oliver Rosto - the only photograph found showing the couple together. (Via Diana Barnaby)*



*Above: Oliver Rosto (left) and Diana Lind after a fishing trip at Florence, Oregon. (Via Diana Barnaby).*

*Below: Oliver Rosto in front of the Ford AT-5-B Trimotor, N9651. (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)*



to Oregon, where the Linds had a summer cottage. On one particular trip, Lars Lind picked up Oliver and Mary for a flight to Oregon. Oliver and Mary continuously smoked the whole trip in the Beechcraft Bonanza (N1399Z, s/n D6786), and it certainly affected Lars Lind. But Lind would never say anything about it to his dear friends. Lind's Beechcraft was purchased in 1961 and it was in service with A.I.R. Corporation until 1966. The Linds kept their boat at Florence, Oregon. It was named "*The Patty Ann*", known from the movie "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" by Ken Kesey. The Rostos and Lind family always went fishing and many salmon were caught and eaten. Lars Lind's children were very fond of the Rosto couple and spent many hours with them. Lars regarded Oliver as a father and a grandfather to his children. Diana Darnaby recalled one time Oliver and Mary were at her folk's home for dinner. Oliver showed her his pilot's license with a low number and a picture of a young boy with a biplane. He told her that he had been friends with one of Wright Brothers. He also said that they had taken away his driver's license because of age, but with a glint in his eyes said that he could still fly! Although he said he was going to drive anyway, he never did. During the mid-sixties, Diana's parents drove them to most places and they normally took taxi's home.

Rosto regularly participated in gatherings of and with the "*Old Timers*" and one of the annual events was the *Nissen Fly-In Barbecue*. The first of these was organized by James "Jim" Nissen (1915 – 1994) at his 70 acre ranch near Livermore (near San Jose, CA) complete with a 1,800 feet paved runway. It was listed on the map as Meadowlark Field, and it was at that time a closed field, which meant open by invitation only. The first *Nissen Fly-In Barbecue* was held in 1962 and started out as an annual event. Later it was held biennially. When the last *Nissen Fly-In Barbecue* was is unknown. Many would fly to the event and they were promptly grounded and not allowed to fly out until the next morning or until they sobered up. The *Nissen Fly-In Barbecue* became a Mecca for antique airplanes. Those who started this were Jim Nissen with his Tommy Morse Scout and Walt Addems with his Nieuport XI both of which were powered by 80hp Le Rhône rotary engines. On July 15, 1967, the cigar-chewing veteran owner-pilot Gaylord E. Moxin flew his Ford 5-AT-B Trimotor, N9651 (s/n 5-AT-34) to the *Nissen Fly-In Barbecue* and a photograph of that aircraft with Oliver Rosto standing next to it, was taken. That same year Bill Berry introduced the fly-in participants to hot air ballooning. In 1971 Jim Ricklefs brought his Hispano-Suiza-powered Spad VII.

Another Rosto attended event was *Baumann's Bash*, started by Jack Baumann owner of the Point Restaurant, located on the Sacramento River in Rio Vista, CA. It usually occurred on Baumann's boat once a year on a Friday night in March or April. The first time this event was organized was sometime in the sixties. The exact date is unknown. For years Oliver Rosto was a guest on board the Baumann Boat. Oliver's doctor knew better than to ask him to give up drinking, so he asked Oliver to drink some milk with his scotch. Oliver carried a thermos of milk with him at all times. On one occasion after a cocktail party, all were leaving the boat to go eat



dinner. Rosto started down the boat's stern ladder and just kept going. He was in the water to his knees before fellow guest Cal Ferris noticed and told him to stop and go sideways!

It has been mentioned before that Rosto was given an office at the North Field of Oakland Airport. Mrs. Arue Beaulieu Szura (secretary and working at the airport) remembers Rosto very well and recalls: *"The men I worked for at the North Field of Oakland Airport (after Transocean) had given Oliver a spare office in the building where I worked as a place where he could hang his hat and photographs taken during his long career in aviation. The office was also a haven away from the apartment he shared with his wife Mary. According to him, she and her women friends held some pretty wild poker games there in the afternoons and he didn't want to be there with all those women. He would arrive at the office around ten or eleven o'clock in the morning wearing his fedora with its brim turned up on one side (a la actor John Barrymore), and his face dusted with talcum powder in the way men did in his time.*

*On the few days when no old friend or business acquaintance called him, Oliver invited the other woman in the office and me to join him for lunch. Oliver was a tall older man with gray hair but when he walked through the door of a restaurant, a blonde on one arm and a brunette on the other, he stood a little straighter and his smile would light up the room. We had listen over lunch while he reminisced about his aviation adventures and drank a Cosmopolitan. Oliver was a gentleman from the old school; he wouldn't ever tell you a risqué story, but his eyes would shine as he told just a bit of a tale and then stopped short of telling you the rest of the story. Frustrating!*

*Oliver was a very private man and as discrete as all get out, but I do remember overhearing him once when he advised a group of men in the office that they should never trust a blonde with thick ankles, and that English women are the most discrete women in the world; they never talked about intimate affairs. I don't know what he told them*



*September 1975: Mary Rosto flanked by Komi Komisarek and Don Perry. This is the last photograph found of Mary. (Via Alvin Grady)*





*Lars Lind, Oliver Rost  
and Glenn Plymate at  
“The Leopard Cafe”, June  
1971. (Via Alvin Grady)*

*when I wasn't present, but I think he made up the whole thing about blondes with thick ankles and English women!*

*When he left the office for the day he would pause at the front door to blow a kiss in my direction, bow from the waist and say “Adieu, Cherie,” or bow and kiss the back of my hand in the finest European tradition. On the day he celebrated his eighty-fourth birthday I asked him how he kept so young. He replied that he never took his work home with him, tried to keep everything in moderation (not too much to drink, not too many ladies), and that he always drove his car in the middle lane of the freeway. But Oliver threw moderation out the window when he turned eighty-five! He had been to lunch with his cronies one day, drank one too many martinis, and side-swiped a car as he drove out of the parking lot at the restaurant. We teased him mercilessly about his accident the next day, but he just smiled and said, “Well, you're never too old to learn!”*

*Oliver flew everything from monoplanes to jets in his lifetime. He was eighty-four years of age he was invited to go up in a jet and allowed to take the controls for a short time. The day that Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, it was Oliver Rost, not Armstrong, who made newspaper headlines all over Norway when a huge celebration was held in his honor.*

*Oliver became a part of the lives of everyone he knew. If he didn't appear at the office, or was late, we worried and checked on him. Eventually his body began to fail him and he stopped coming to the office and gave up his will to live. It was against his nature to live on when he could no longer do all the things that meant life to him. He didn't even want to see anyone when he was ill. We would telephone him and try our best to cheer him up, even invited him to lunch, but he always declined. I think he wanted to be remembered the way he was, not old and frail as he now was at ninety-one.”*

## Oliver Rosto Called by Death

Looking back on the life of Oliver Rosto, he had a fantastic journey with many highlights and exciting events. But every life on this earth has an end and for Oliver Rosto this was no exception. At the age of 87 he had flown as a passenger in a Lockheed T-33 Shooting Star jet of the U.S. Air Force. In March 1972, Oliver Rosto had made his final flight and on April 2, suffered a stroke and was taken by ambulance from his home at 491 Staten Avenue to Peralta Hospital at 450 30th Street. A week later, on Monday, April 10, 1972, at 11.05 a.m., Oliver Andre Rosto passed away in peace.

After his death he was taken to the Albert Brown Mortuary, where he was cremated at the Mountain View Crematory (3476 Piedmont Avenue), nestled in the foothills of Oakland and Piedmont.<sup>12</sup> An old flying friend, retired State Supreme Court Justice B. Rey Schauer, delivered the eulogy at a service on April 13, 1972, at 2.00 p.m. When Mrs. Arue Beaulieu Szura heard about his death she felt sad beyond words when notified: *“A private funeral was held for his family, and later a memorial for friends was held at a mortuary in Oakland. Vases of flowers and easels holding photographs of Oliver at various stages in his life stood where a casket normally would be, and a few of his comrades gave short eulogies sprinkled with humor and memories of Oliver. I think his memorial was exactly as he would have wanted it to be. I could feel his presence in the room and my heart felt a little bit lighter when I left the mortuary*

***The last flight of Oliver Rosto:*** *His ashes were taken up by his friends Lars Lind and Glenn Plymate and scattered across the San Francisco Bay. The aircraft was a Cessna 195, N195K. (Glenn Plymate)*



*for I knew that he had lived a wonderful life and was loved by people all over the world, including me. Adieu, Oliver!*” After the cremation, his ashes were taken by his dear friends Lars Lind and Glenn Plymate. They took Oliver’s ashes with them in Glenn’s Cessna 195 (N195K) and took it up to the San Francisco Bay where they spread his ashes at sea.<sup>13</sup> Rosto had made his last and definitive flight.

As to what Mary did following Rosto’s death, she remained at least until 1975 in Oakland before moving back to Lancaster, PA to be close to her daughter Evelyn. There is a photograph of her, dating from 1975 and as far as can be confirmed, she still lived at 491 Staten Ave, Oakland, California.<sup>14</sup> Her last years were spent near her family. She passed away Evelyn’s house in Landisville, Lancaster County, PA<sup>15</sup> in January 1980<sup>16</sup>.

I would like to end the book with the well written text from an obituary written by Camille Ronneberg of The Norwegian Club, San Francisco. She wrote about Oliver Rosto: *“The men of Norway have long been associated with ships, therefore it is interesting to note that one of America’s leaders of early-day aviation was a Norwegian...”* and *“...so ended the career of a courageous Norseman who looked to the skies, rather than the sea”*.<sup>17</sup>

## **Induction Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame**

On January 2009 an invitation arrived at my inbox from Alvin Grady of Hermantown, Minnesota to attend the Twentieth Annual Induction Ceremony of the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame, an annual ceremony taking place in Bloomington, Minnesota. It was to take place on Saturday, May 2, 2009. Also invited were the family Westerås and Norwegian story teller Hans Olav Løkken. The reason for the invitation was that the Norwegian-American aviator Oliver Andre Rosto was to be inducted.

During my research on Rosto I came in contact with the family Westerås, who were the Norwegian descendants of Oliver Andre Rosto. Five persons (Henning, Sigrid, Jan, Marit and Lene) from this family came together in Bloomington along with Hans Olav Løkken and myself. The family would accept the induction on behalf of Oliver Andre Rosto. In addition, Alvin Grady invited us to come to Duluth to see the places where Rosto lived and worked, and where he took off on his first flight. The day before the ceremony we drove from Minneapolis north to Duluth. The landscape looked much the same as Østfold in Norway. Thousands of birch trees were visible along the way. We could well imagine that so many Norwegians settled in this state. We drove a Ford E350 van that Hans Olav had rented. If we drove faster than 65 mph, it was difficult to keep control of the van. Along the way we saw many place names that reminded us of Scandinavia: Askov, Mora, Bannevig Junction, Tofte, Esko, etc. After a two plus hour trip, we arrived at the hills of Duluth and ended at the edge of a very quiet Lake Superior. We were told that it could be really bad here when the wind whipped up off the lake. We met our hosts Alvin

and Rosie Grady. Rosie has Swedish ancestors and the maiden name of Anderson. Alvin had made an excellent information booklet on Duluth as well as Oliver Rosto and we were given a tour of the city. According to a sign outside Duluth this small town had 86,319 inhabitants and was an important port. Lots of coal and ore were transported from here to the rest of the world. We started with a short visit of the Canal Park Marine museum, but of course, we were all excited to see the places that were related to Oliver Andre Rosto. After the tour we took a walk along the beach promenade. Alvin could tell us that we were pretty close to the place where Rosto had dragged his “Rosto Monoplane” out on the ice and had taken off. In fact, we could see the approximate spot from where we stood. On the same site now is the Duluth Vietnam Monument. We continued our tour of Duluth and stopped at Leif Erikson Park and the rose garden, which was a very nice park with a statue of Norwegian explorer Leif Erikson. From the park we could again see the place where Rosto had taken off from the ice. It gave us a strange feeling to stand there and we tried to imagine how he must have felt when he managed to take off from the ice and be one of the first Duluthians to see the city from the air. Many residents were probably jealous and had wanted to be with him to see their city from the air.

We drove to the city center and on to the corner of 1st Street and 3rd Avenue, the location of “The Auditorium” of The L. Hammel Co., where Oliver Rosto had built his monoplane. That building has since been replaced by a parking garage. Oliver Andre Rosto brought his plane down the hill from “The Auditorium” and across Superior Street to the lake - only a few hundred yards. After a short stop here, we drove past the spot where Rosto had lived and the garage where the Mutual Auto Company had operated its production facility. Rosto worked there and helped to



*The family West-erås walking in Rosto's footsteps in Duluth. With sun glasses the hosts Alvin and Rosie Grady. (Rob Mulder)*

build the Chalmers Six cars that could carry no less than seven persons. There were several people in Duluth who wondered why our group of seven people were there and photographing the old building. The old Mutual Auto Company building is actually still used for cars, but only now for just parking. Perhaps as a small gesture to Oliver Rosto the building is now called the "Pioneer Building". Just before we started to drive on, we were stopped by a gentleman, who wondered if we would like to buy the place since we were taking pictures of it! We continued our tour of Duluth before it was time for some lunch and the return trip back to Minneapolis.

The Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame induction ceremony took place the next day in Bloomington at the Ramada Mall of America. The ceremony began with a welcome drink in the reception area before we moved into the banquet room, where we were seated at the Rosto table. Lene Westerås set the Norwegian flag on the table. The dinner began with a prayer by an American priest, after which the Minnesota ROTC Wing Color Guard carried in the flags of the United States and Minnesota. Noel Allard, chairman of the organizing committee, opened the evening and reminded us of those inductees who had fallen in the past year. Then, all of the prior and new inductees of the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame were honored with applause. The induction ceremony began right after dinner. First introduced was Kathleen C. Winters who was voted Best Aviation Writer by a Minnesotan. She had written the masterpiece *Anne Morrow Lindbergh, First Lady of the Air*. Subsequently, the late artist Donald G. Carlson (1920-2007) was honored as Best Aviation Art by a Minnesotan. Donald had made many fine paintings of aircraft. It was the son of Don, Jeff Carlson, who accepted the award on behalf of the family. Then there three scholarships awarded to students before the actual ceremony began. Stan Ross then introduced each of the seven nominees. Those inducted were Gordon C Amundson, Waldo R Anderson, Dr George Bolon, K Gregg Nelson (the plaque was received by the family), Donald Piccard (known balloon family - his cousin Bertrand Piccard was the first to fly around the earth in a balloon), Mathew J. Ryan, and finally Oliver Andre Rosto. A proud family Westerås went up on the podium to accept the induction and Alvin Grady, who had worked so hard to get Rosto inducted was quite emotional as Lene Westerås made her acceptance speech. The induction was completed with a medal and plaque of Oliver Andre Rosto. Many of those present were impressed by the fact that the family had come from Norway to be present at the induction ceremony. A big applause followed when Henning officially accepted the award. After the ceremony pictures were taken, and many Americans came to our table to congratulate the family. After several public photos had been taken the flags of the United States and Minnesota, were carried out and the official program was over. There were many pleasant hours afterwards in the bar.

Recognition of Oliver Andre Rosto means a lot to Norwegians and of course very much also for the family Westerås. They have worked hard the last ten years to find out more about Oliver Andre Rosto and get his achievements recorded.





*On May 2, 2009, Oliver Andre Rosto was inducted into the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame.*

*Left page - left side: The proof that Rosto has been inducted.*

*Left page - right side: The logo of the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame.*

*Left page - below: The Westerås Family accepted the induction on behalf of there great grandfather and great great grandfather.*

*(All images Alvin Grady)*

## **Not Giving Up**

- 1 From <http://www.norwegianclub.org/>
- 2 Personal visit of author to the Norwegian Club in San Francisco and information obtained on site.
- 3 From <http://naa.aero/html/aboutNaa/index.cfm?cmsid=93>
- 4 From <http://www.worldwar1aeroplanesinc.org>
- 5 Text taken from a photograph supplied by Alvin Grady
- 6 From <http://earlyaviators.com>
- 7 From <http://ox5.org>
- 8 From <http://arnold-air.org/sw/>
- 9 From <http://www.worldwar1aeroplanesinc.org>
- 10 Article written by Dyer C. Thomas, published in the magazine “Beam”, dated November 1955.
- 11 Article *Old Time Airmen Tell of Exploits*”, in the Reno Evening Gazette, November 15, 1958
- 12 Certificate of Death, No. 72-044729, Department of Health Services, California
- 13 E-Mail correspondence between author and Glenn Plymate.
- 14 Letter from Camille Ronneberg to Jerry Sandvick, dated February 8, 1981.
- 15 E-Mail from Walter Cramer, dated September 2, 2011.
- 16 Date found at <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.2/QQSL-FZM/p1>, but by the name Mary Troop and with social security no. 167-26-9238. But residence give, Allegheny, PA, ZIP Code 15213, which is actually the Allegheny County Health Department. Date of birth (December 8, 1893) coincides with Mary Rosto’s birth date.
- 17 Obituary written by Camille Ronneberg for Sons of Norway Newsletter, April 1972.

# Post Script



Back in 2009, when I offered to write this book, I felt kind for sorry with myself. At that moment the task of reconstructing the life of this norse-american aviator looked like a mountain too high for me. But thorough research and help from many others has brought about most of the facts correctly. It is of course a pity it has not been possible to get his flying activities confirmed before 1913, but it is very, very likely that the solo flight made off the ice on February 26, 1913, was Rosto's first. He might well have flown as a passenger in 1911-12 in Paris, but certainly not earlier. The information he spread throughout his lifetime in Norwegian and American newspapers might suggest otherwise, but every story had a twist making his claim less creditable. Of course, this might make it difficult for family and friends to believe the truth as well. But I think that the story, as it is written down here, and based on the information I have found is the most correct story.

Oliver Andre Rosto has never been a big inventor or nor did he play a significant role in aviation, but his achievements were more than could be expected. He was intelligent and had a head for technique. He was highly respected within aviation circles and was known as a reliable inspector, while working with Curtiss, the U.S. Navy and the C.A.A. and its predecessors. The recognition shown by the awarding of the *Civil Aeronautics Administration Silver Medal for Distinguished Service* confirms this.

Norway does not have to rewrite its aviation history. The claim that Oliver Rosto has flown solo on November 15, 1909 cannot be proved. But he did as Norwegian design, build and fly his own monoplane. That is an achievement that Norwegians can add to their already rich aviation history. Since 1916 he worked as inspector of aircraft manufacturers, airline maintenance plants and airlines and he supported the formation of airlines in Europe right after the Second World War. And once retired from the service, he could not stop thinking about aviation and at the age of 71 started to work for Transocean Air Lines' subsidiary Aircraft Engineering & Maintenance Company – AEMCO. He certainly had

## A Life Dedicated To Aviation

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*Above left: On October 12, 1962 visited the U.S.S. Ranger. Posing next to a Navy jet.*



*Above right: He sitting in the Captain's bridge chair. (Both: Official photography U.S. Navy)*

*Right: Lars Lind in front of his Beechcraft Bonanza. (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)*



*Three years before his death, Oliver Rosto made a flight in a Lockheed T-33 Shooting Star trainer. He is seen here before departure. (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)*



## Kitty Hawk Celebrations



*"Billy" Parker in the Curtiss Pusher at Moffett Field, CA, with Early Bird members around him. From left to right are Dana DeHart, Anthony Stadlman, Stanley Hiller, Billy Parker, Oliver Rosto, Speed Johnson, Hillery Beachey and Bob Fowler.*

*Kitty Hawk Celebration, December 5, 1958. From left to right: Robert Fowler, Cleve T. Schaffer, Harry P. Christofferson, Oliver A. Rosto, Mrs Ruth Law Oliver, Stanley Hiller, Frank T. Coffyn, Anthony Stadlman and Berle J. Williams. (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)*



*Kitty Hawk Celebration, December 17, 1970. From left to right: Oliver A. Rosto, Anthony Stadlman, Dana C. DeHart, Charles F. West, Walter J. Addams and Walter Bullock. (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)*



*Above: From left to right: Lt Col Benjamin C. Murph; Col Gabriel P. Bartholomew; Cal Ferris, Glenn Hall, Oliver Rosto and John Maggi. Cal Ferris was President of the San Francisco Chapter of the Air Force Association and was host to the two Air Force officers from Nellis AFB for a briefing on the F-111. (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)  
 Below: Rosto standing close to the engine of TWA's Boeing 307 Stratoliner. (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)*





*Autographed photo from the famous aviator Franklin Rose of Varney Speed Lines, dedicated to Oliver Rosto. (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)*







*Above: Photograph send to Oliver Rosto by Ralph Saunders. The text reads: "To Oliver Rosto, Many pleasant memories of aviation". (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)*



*Left: Rosto with Robert G. Fowler. (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)*

*Above: May 1971 - Jack Irwin, Tony Stadlman and Oliver Rosto. (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)*

# Rosto receives the “Quiet Bird Man of the Year” Award, June 1971



Left: Oliver Rosto receives the award as “Quiet Birdman - Man of the Year”.  
 Right: Lars Lind taking care of the award for Oliver Rosto.  
 (Both: Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)



Above: November 1971 - Last known photograph of Oliver Rosto.  
 Right: Obituaries about Oliver Rosto.  
 (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)





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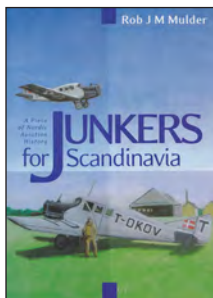
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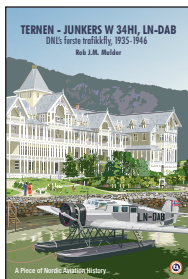
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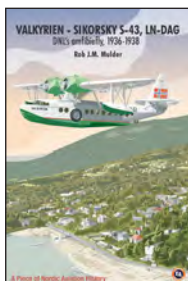
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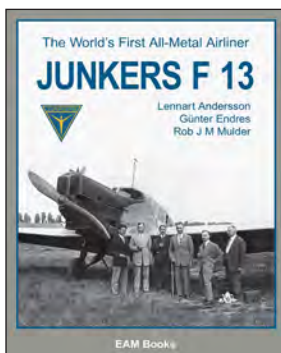


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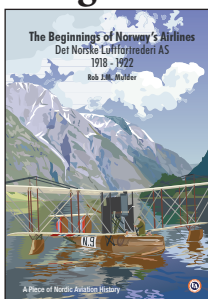
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