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Hattie Meyers Junkin Papers - Writings: "What is This Thing Called Soaring", US Air Service , 1931-11

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Mrs. Hoover Christens the "American Clipper"

SIX men each 75 years old, if they could take each other by the hand, would reach back to that Friday morning, the 12th of October, 1492, when Columbus first beheld the New World. When the naked savages issued from all parts of the woods and appeared by their attitudes and gestures to be lost in astonishment, they entertained the idea that the white men wearing such luxuriant beards came from Heaven—capital H. When in the course of subsequent voyages, the Spaniards conversed with Cacique Nicaragua, he inquired how they came down from the skies, whether flying, or whether they descended on clouds. We wish it could be stated that Columbus immediately said, "What this country needs is airports," but that message was delayed for 435 years and then was delivered with great effect by Colonel Lindbergh, an indirect result being the occasion celebrated on October 12, 1931, at the Naval Air Station, Anacostia, D. C., when Mrs. Herbert Hoover christened the largest airplane in the world designed for commercial service the *American Clipper*, and the Pan American Airways officially took over the beautiful Sikorsky S-40 to be its flagship on the international line that extended from Miami, Fla., through Central and South America to Buenos Aires.

Mrs. Hoover christens aircraft such as the Akron and the American Clipper with great goof will and sincerity. However, she never uses the word. The newspapers quote her as saying to the various aircraft struck by her with bottled water, I christen thee. Not so. She never uses the word. She always says distinctly, I name thee thus and so.

IN the case of the *American Clipper* it would be difficult to see how Mrs. Hoover could have chosen a better name for an American ship of the skies. The famous old Yankee Clipper type ship developed during the first half of the 19th century was "the ideal of applied art and a sheer delight to the eye"—the possessor of "that peculiarly satisfying beauty which always belongs to the thing absolutely fitted for the purpose it is designed to fill."

What was true 100 years ago is true today. the *American Clipper*, flagship of the Pan American Airways, possess that peculiarly satisfying beauty aforementioned. The origin of the word clipper is not definitely known. Some authors think that the expression "going at a clip" might have been responsible for it. Going at a clip fits this latest representative of the clipper family, as your correspondent can testify, based upon actual personal experience in being taken at more than a clip above the nation's capital for a flight lasting twenty minutes.

IN ONE compartment, on the morning of October 13th, were three women who were making their first flight. The quality and beauty of the interior decorations were so pronounced that their attention was riveted on the blue and orange upholstery, the draperies of heavy rose gray silk, the walls of walnut finish, the reading lights, ash tray, cigarette lighters, ice box, electric stove, and steward's pantry. There are electric fixtures in each compartment, call system for the steward, and individual ventilation units. everything the best. Surely nobody would spend the money to provide all these comfortable and luxurious furnishings if anything could happen to the ship. That thought was expressed by one of the women before the flight started, and it seemed so sensible and, in these times, so logical that the others in the compartment settled back to enjoy themselves when the roar of the motors indicated we would soon be up and doing.

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FROM the point of view of Pan American Airways the *American Clipper* and a sister ship which is already under construction by the Sikorsky Aviation Corporation, represent an investment of nearly a half-million dollars toward encouraging development, in this country, of big marine flying boats to maintain leadership, for American airlines, in the international field. It is the flagship of the international air mail fleet of the United States, larger fleet of multimotored airplanes in the world, which now ply over the Pan American route linking the United States with every country but two in the Western Hemisphere.

The eldest of the women sat unconcerned but obviously happy, as the great ship took off the water near Haines Point at about 75 miles an hour and began to rise. She asked if the monument seen through the window at her right was the Masonic memorial to Washington at Alexandria, Va., and being told that it was remarked.

"Well, I think this is simply marvelous! I certainly must have me one of these ships for my very own."

She walked up and down the aisle, peering out of the windows on both sides the way railway passenger follow the idiosyncrasies of the Horseshoe Bend between Altoona and Pittsburgh. Conversation was easy at only slightly more h.p. per word than used in the home. There were no bumps, and the pilot touched the water at about 65 miles an hour so easily that the passengers, some of whom had prepared themselves for something notable in the line of renewed contact with it, were almost disappointed. One slight jolt, and then a happy sense of refreshment as the windows were splashed with spray and the airplane headed for shore.

if the owners had suggested taking those forty passengers to Miami, it would have been unanimously considered a fine idea.

DURING the christening ceremonies, with music by two band, and speeches by several men important in public life, Mr. Igor Sikorsky sat inconspicuously among the seats reserved for the public. You had to know him by sight to know that the designer of the American Clipper was present. He took a seat in the ship on its first flight following the ceremony, and the rest of the passengers did not know they had the famous designer with them. Mr. Sikorsky is like that, and as things go in these days of high pressure publicity for personalities, whether the personalities have designed anything or merely felt that they'd like to, it was not held against him by those who realize that the modesty of this gentleman is as sincere as his love for aerodynamics.

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