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Harold E. Morehouse Flying Pioneers Biographies Collection - Laird, Emil M. "Mattie"

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of Laird's activities. Billy Burke had a friend in Oklahoma, Jake Moellendeck, who had struck it rich in oil, then moved to Wichita, Kansas. Being aviation minded through Burke, Moellendeck soon played a leading role in establishing Wichita as an early aviation center. Later in 1919 Laird was planning another new plane and Burke induced him to move his operations to Wichita, Kansas, where he and Moellendeck each put up \$15,000. Laird contributed his completed "Model S" planes, machinery, equipment and inventory of materials valued at \$15,000 and this three-member partnership formed the E. M. Laird Company of Wichita to manufacture the new Laird 3-passenger commercial plane, using war surplus Curtiss OX engines. A small factory and flying field were established and the first plane was completed in early 1920 named the "Laird Swallow" and was the first truly commercial plane on the market after World War I. It was a 3-seat tandem tractor biplane of 38 feet span having a speed range of 38-84 m.p.h. A number of them were built and sold.

Later that year serious friction developed between Burke and Moellendeck. Burke withdrew from the company, and returned to Oklahoma, accepting as settlement two new Laird "Swallows", a large quantity of spare parts, and the Laird dealership for Oklahoma. Since Burke has been doing all the flying Laird hired his old friend George E. "Buck" Weaver as replacement. All seemed to be going well when Laird and Weaver left in April, 1921 to fly a new Swallow to the west coast to establish dealers there. While they were gone Moellendeck hired Walter Beech as pilot and placed him in charge of all flying operations. Very shortly Beech wrecked a new Laird Swallow and two other pilots who were hired at that time also had smashups. After some six to eight months Laird and Weaver returned from the west coast and Moellendeck requested Weaver's resignation although he had a clean "no breakage" flying record. This, together with the series of

8

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