

The Aviation Meet of 1910

By MARCO R. NEWMARK

DURING THE ten days between January 10 and 21, 1910, the eyes of the world were focused on Dominguez Field, the use of which Joseph and Edward Carson tendered, without compensation, as the locale for the first international air meet to be held in America.

The course was $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles, 519.63 feet in length, and was in the form of an octagon. The meet was conducted under the auspices of the Merchants and Manufacturers Association. David A. Hamburger was Chairman of the arrangement committee; Perry W. Weidner was Treasurer and Lynden E. Behymer had charge of the sale of tickets. The other members of the committee were Fred L. Baker, Martin C. Neuner, Dick Ferris, William May Garland and Felix J. Zeehandelarr, Secretary of the Association.

A perusal of the newspapers of that not far-off time manifests the startling contrast between the records then established and the marvels of aviation today, when, in a few hours, man can travel from almost every part of the world to almost every other part; when airmen have soared through the stratosphere to an altitude of fifty-six thousand feet and have attained to a speed of six hundred miles an hour.

Both interesting and amusing, too, are the journalistic reports of the emotions of the spectators then as compared to our almost matter of fact acceptance of the infinitely more amazing accomplishments of aviation today.

Of interest, also, are a number of prophecies which were made by the authorities during the meet, concerning the future possibilities of aviation.

So much by way of preface. Let us now proceed to the task of resurrecting from the files of the contemporary newspapers an account of the meet, together with a few other items worthy of record, which appeared in the press before and subsequent to the meet.

On January 4, one article in the advance publicity recalled that Charles K. Hamilton had previously flown in two snowstorms and

had gone up in a forty-mile wind, which we learn was the record for daring; and it is further related that the highest wind in which an airplane had hitherto flown was one of fifteen miles, and that this had been considered extremely dangerous.

Leaving these preliminaries, we will now enter upon a consideration of the historic Aviation Meet, which was attended by a total of 176,466 Angelenos and visitors from far and near; and of some of the more noteworthy of the events which distinguished the ten days of its duration, and also of some of the comments of reporters and editorial writers concerning the events and the reactions of the spectators who witnessed them.

That the government realized the importance of the meet to the development of aviation is demonstrated by the fact that it detailed Lieutenant Paul W. Beck, of the Signal Corps, to attend and make an exhaustive study of aeronautics and to make a report on the result of a night attack by a balloon force on a warship in San Pedro Harbor, the balloon Los Angeles having been put at the Lieutenant's disposal by the Merchants and Manufacturers Association, which had recently purchased it.

There is no further reference to the attack, so that we do not know whether the plan was eventually actually carried out or not.

On the first day of the meet, Glen H. Curtis accomplished the first successful flight ever made in an airplane on the Pacific Coast. Using a biplane of his own invention and construction, he "negotiated" nearly a mile in the air, remaining aloft nearly two minutes; and "he came to the ground only at his own volition," a performance which inspired this comment: "The hearts of five thousand persons were set to thumping as never before in their lives when Curtis left the ground and soared like a bird through the air."

The writer continues, "An indescribable feeling comes over one when an aeroplane begins its flight. It is a feeling of awe and exaltation, of joy and fear. One's nerves grow tense; one's heart beats faster and one feels glad in the realization that he is living in the wonderful twentieth century."

Concerning the flight of a Wright machine, the enthusiastic journalist exultingly comments, "then, over the grass—before your startled gaze!—while your eyes are popping out!—why, man alive, look at that!—the airship picks up astonishing speed!—like an express train she is flying and hurrah!—she leaves the ground!—glides upward!—higher!—and higher, at one hundred miles an hour, off into the blue!—hip, hip—hooray!" (The punctuation is the journalist's.)

On the eleventh, two Curtis biplanes, one carrying a passenger, one Farman biplane with Paul Paulhan, a member of the French

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Signal Corps, at the steering wheel and Masson hanging on for dear life behind him; two dirigibles, one piloted by Roy Knabenshue and the other by Lincoln Beachy; a Bleriot monoplane with Miscarol in the cockpit, and a captive balloon were all in the air at the same time. "Such a sight," said the scribe, "has never been witnessed before, anywhere" (and, it may be added, never will be again).

On the twelfth, Paulhan broke all records for height—4165 feet—in a biplane, a feat which inspired a prophecy that Los Angeles would ever be the biggest and brightest spot in aviation.

On the thirteenth, Paulhan took Mrs. Dick Ferris and Florence Stone, well-known stage stars of the day, on a flight, the first heavier than air flight by a woman on the Pacific Coast.

A performance of the fourteenth is of sufficiently amusing interest to justify a verbatim report: "Paulhan flew to San Pedro—over the site of the new fortification (Fort MacArthur), over the Palos Verdes Hills, out over the sea-swept cliffs of Point Firmin, out toward the breakwater and across the harbor.

"A sleepy deckhand on a tug looked, hastily rubbed his eyes, and looked again and shouted to the pilot. Then the shrill shriek of the whistle aroused the shipping and in a twinkling the harbor and the town awoke. Bells were rung and the crowd rushed out to see the aviator who had so strangely and silently swept across the sky.

"When the sound of the whirring reached some Chinese they looked above and with cries of terror threw themselves face downward on the ground. Another dip over a ranch house sent the domestic fowls scurrying for cover and nearly threw a patient cow into hysterics.

"After the flight, Edward Cleary, Manager of the Paulhan interests, threw his arms around the little man-bird and kissed him a dozen times on each cheek. It was a sight to make the eyes of the strongest man run with tears.

"The crowd went home happy in the knowledge that it had seen the greatest flight in modern times and had partaken in a world epoch."

On the fourteenth, also, appeared the following statement:

"If airships should ever be employed for warlike purposes and it is possible they may have to be used just once in order to teach the world the most terrible lesson of its history, they will render helpless and obsolete all the warships. Naval programs may as well be abandoned. A mercantile fleet carrying armed aeroplanes will be more than a match for any war fleet."

On the sixteenth, one of the dailies reported that S. H. Bensoist claims to have invented an airship that will rise vertically, can poise in the air like a humming bird and return to the exact spot from which it started.

Official Program Thursday, Jan. 20
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Front Cover of Official Program of the World's First Aviation Meet.

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His invention did not materialize, but future developments were to demonstrate the validity of his idea in the gyroscope plane.

On the eighteenth, Paulhan again distinguished himself. He made a flight from the field over the San Gabriel Valley to the foothills which rise from the edge of Santa Anita, circled the race track and then to San Pedro—forty-five miles in one hour, two minutes and forty-two and four-fifth seconds, the longest cross country flight the world had ever seen.

On the nineteenth, Paulhan, with Madame Paulhan as a passenger, made a flight which moved the reporter to this outburst: "To those who stood with upturned faces, wildly waving their hands and loudly cheering, while their eyes bulged with amazement, the sight of Paulhan and his wife skimming through the air three hundred feet above Redondo Beach and Hermosa and go down to the sea was a wonder of wonders. They were beholding for the first time the newest form of travel."

On the same date was published the following news item: "Interest in the army maneuvers was heightened when it became known that the Hague Peace Tribunal had just issued a bulletin asking all nations to sign an agreement which will make the throwing of bombs from aeroplanes 'unpermissible' in war."

Any remarks concerning this idealistic gesture would seem to be superfluous.

On the twentieth, a parade around the course nicely illustrated the transition from ancient to modern methods of land transportation. There were men on horseback, in an oxcart, on bicycles and motorcycles, in automobiles, in a carriage, and in an aeroplane.

As a matter of interest, we record the following statement made in a paper of January 25, 1910: "Charles K. Hamilton flew in his Curtis biplane across the border line of the United States over the ancient Mexican city of Tia Juana, today, and then flew back to the polo field at the Coronado Country Club without a stop. He was gone from the field forty minutes and traveled thirty-four miles.

"He then made a flight over the ocean, by moonlight, staying up three and a half minutes and alighted in the deep shadows that had settled below the sky line.

"Two new records: 1. Flew further over the water than Louis Bleriot over the English Channel (in 1909). 2. It was the first flight ever recorded where both start and finish were in semi-darkness."

In this connection, it may be of historical interest to refer to an article in a Los Angeles paper of September 9, 1910, which we will quote verbatim: "Charles K. Hamilton offers to race an automobile at the Sacramento Fiesta of the Dawn of Gold at night." He said,

“the conditions here for flying are perfect and I think I can give you something in the way of new records that will be worth telegraphing around the world.

“Night flights have never been attempted on account of the danger, except for a flight I made at Nashville, Tennessee, for the United States, for which I received a diamond studded medal.”

Returning now from digression to the air meet itself, we know, not only from the day to day reports of the many events which crowded its calendar, but from the subsequent editorials that it was a complete success and we may conclude as well that the financial outcome was equally gratifying; for after paying all expenses and cash prizes plus \$50,000 which had been guaranteed to Paulhan, William May Garland was able to announce that all subscribers to the fund with which the meet was financed would be repaid and in addition receive a bonus of fifteen per cent.

In appreciation of their brilliant organizing and conduct of the meet, the citizens of Los Angeles, under the chairmanship of Max Meyberg, on January 29, tendered to the members of the Committee a celebrative banquet at the Alexandria Hotel.

A concluding word of this air meet of thirty-six years ago may now be in order.

From the vantage point of our own era we may smile at the feats of aviation which in 1910 astonished the world; we may find amusing the intense enthusiasm and emotions they aroused in those who witnessed them; but as we smile, let us remember that not only was the meet the excellent and exciting show it was designed to be, but that it also accomplished the far more important objective of making a considerable contribution to the development of aviation; and do not let us forget that the achievements of our own age, not alone in aviation but in all fields, as marvelous as they may seem to us, are, too, but steps on the path to even much greater achievements in the future and will no doubt be contemplated by later generations with sentiments very closely akin to those which the triumphs of our predecessors in the past inspire in their successors of today.