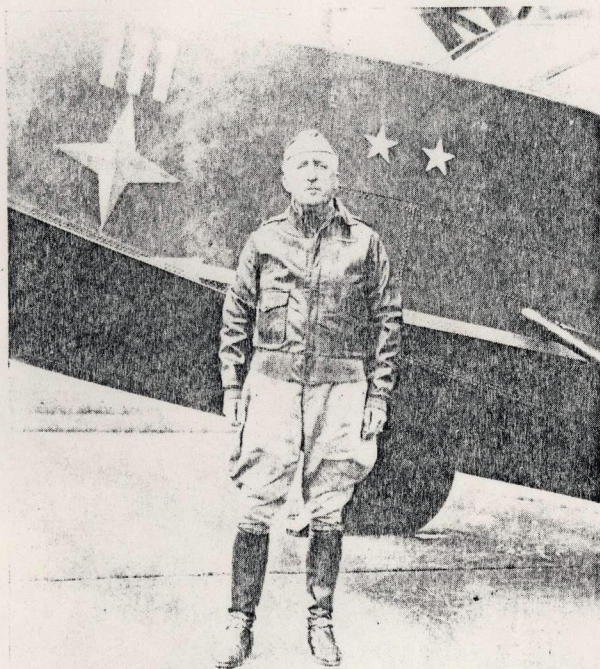


# ARMY AND NAVY AVIATION IN HAWAII

By FRANK A. VON HELLAND

*Membership Secretary, Pan-Pacific Union,  
formerly with the U. S. Army Air Corps*



*Major General Hugh A. Drum, Commanding General of  
the Army Forces in the Hawaiian Department.*

On May 9, 1918, Major Harold M. Clark, Air Service, Signal Corps, in an old "Jenny" type seaplane, flew from Honolulu to Hawaii, thus making the first over-water flight ever performed in the Hawaiian Islands and opening the path of inter-island and Pan Pacific aviation history. Although Major Clark came down to a forced landing on the slopes of Mauna Kea and although the ship was badly damaged, Major Clark was uninjured.

So today, from a small handful of Army pilots and airplanes arriving in the Hawaiian Islands from San Diego, California, in 1917, the Army Air Forces of this territory have grown to the present highly efficient Air Corps with a history and background worthwhile recalling.

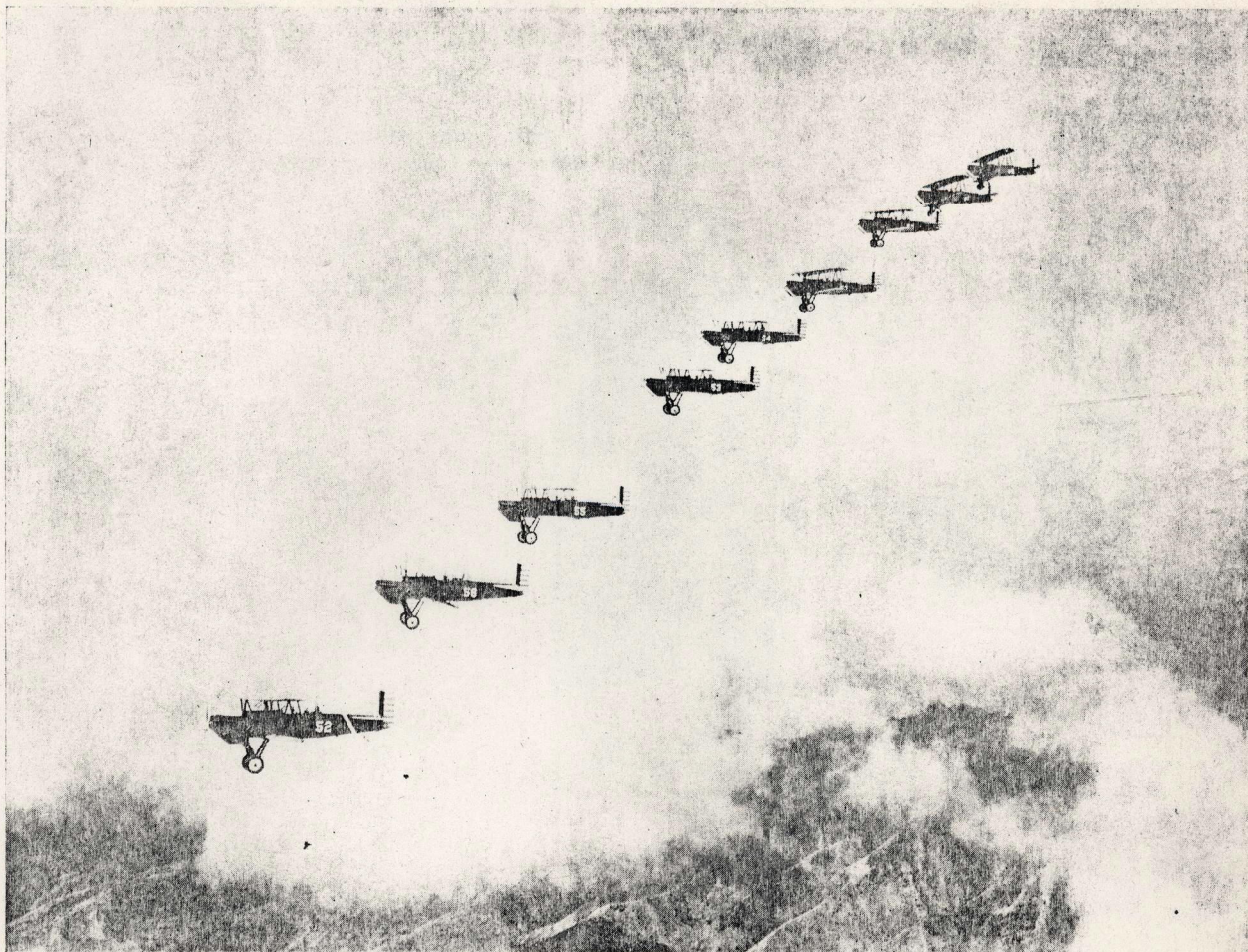
Following the World War, during 1920, 1921, and 1922, more Army squadrons arrived in Hawaii from the Mainland and from France and 7 new squadrons were organized here. The 5th Composite Group, now stationed at Luke Field, was organized on May 11, 1923, and the 17th Composite Group, later designated the 18th Pursuit Group, was organized at Wheeler Field, Schofield, Schofield Barracks.

Both Army flying fields here, namely Luke Field and Wheeler Field, were named after two of the United States Army's greatest fliers. Wheeler Field, located at the southern edge of Schofield Barracks, is named in honor of Major Sheldon H. Wheeler, U.S. Army Air Corps, who crashed and was killed at Luke Field; and Luke Field, located on Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, was named in honor of the World War hero, Lieutenant Frank Luke, better known as the "balloon buster", who was killed in action during the World War.

The year 1927 found the Army Air Corps in Hawaii considerably interested in, and lending aid to, a number of transpacific flyers. First came the "Army's own" in transpacific flights—the flight of the Fokker transport "Bird of Paradise", piloted and navigated by Lieutenants L. J. Maitland and A. F. Hegenberger, from Oakland, California, to Wheeler Field on June 28th and 29th, 1927, successfully accomplishing the first transpacific flight. This appropriately named airplane saw considerable service with the Army Air Corps in Hawaii following its epochal flight, and finally came to rest in an aeronautical museum at Dayton, Ohio. Transpacific flying continued during July and August of that year, and several successful flights were witnessed. Second Lieutenants Ernest Smith and Emery Bronte, Air Corps Reserve, flew from Oakland to Molokai. Art Goebel and Martin Jensen in two airplanes completed flights from Oakland to Wheeler Field, where both were assisted by the Army Air Corps. The following summer, Captain Charles Kingsford-Smith, the world famous British flyer, was aided by the personnel of Wheeler Field while on his flight from the mainland to Australia.

The year 1931 added an interesting chapter to the Army's history during the International Glider Meet, held on the island of Oahu from November 22nd to December 19th. Second Lieutenant William A. Cocks, Air Corps, Wheeler Field, T. H., broke the world's record for glider flying, both for endurance and distance, by remaining in the air 21 hours, 34 minutes, 15 seconds, traveling an estimated distance of 600 miles, on December 17th-18th.



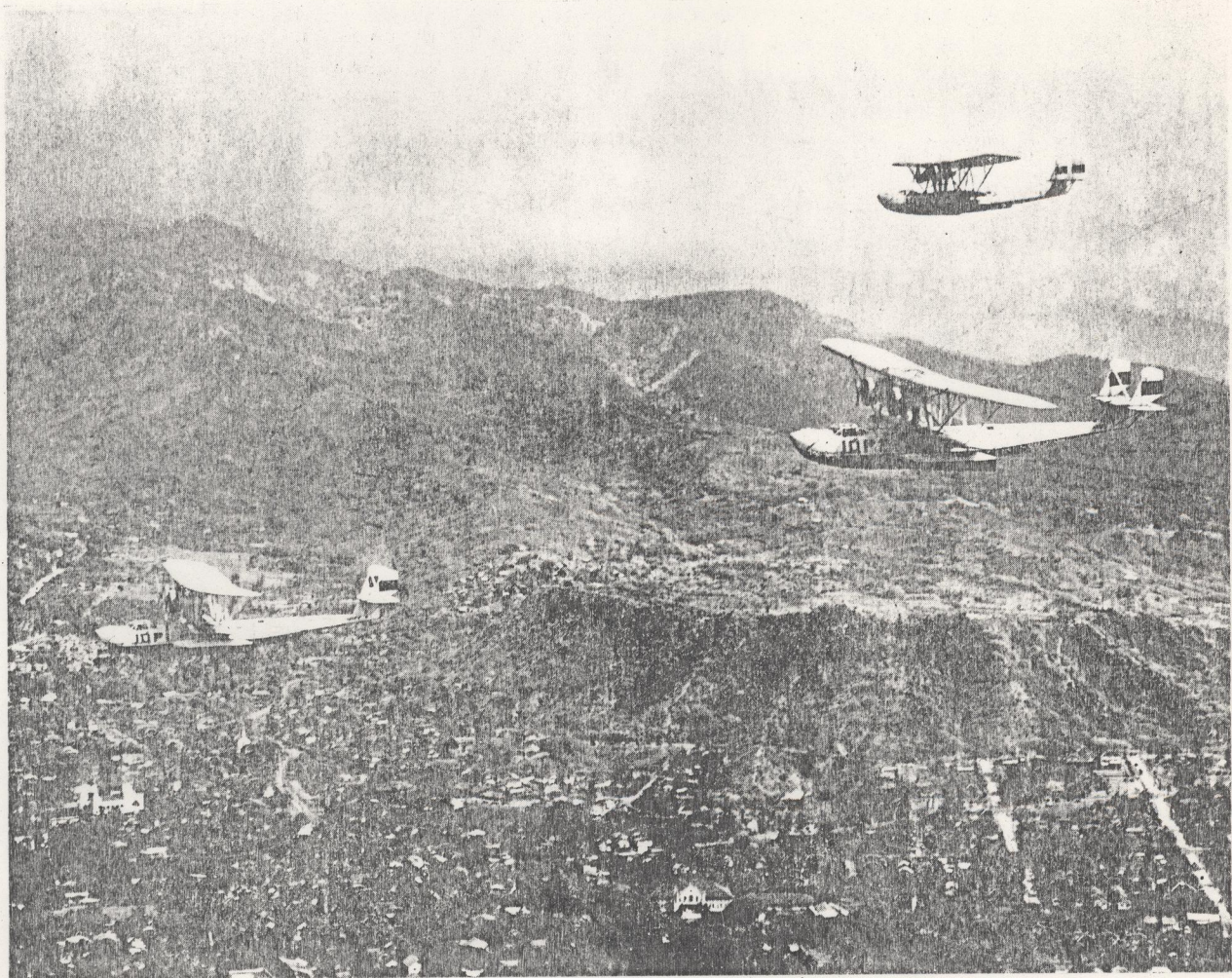


*Silhouetted against fleecy clouds above the green-clad hills of Oahu, the 26th Attack Squadron of Wheeler Field flies in imposing formation. Below, left to right: Brigadier General Barton K. Vount, Air Corps, U.S.A., Commanding Officer of U. S. Army Air Forces in Hawaii; Lieut. Col. John C. McDonald, Air Corps, U.S.A., Commanding Officer of Wheeler Field; Lieut. Col. M. F. Harmon, Air Corps, U.S.A., Commanding Officer of Luke Field.*



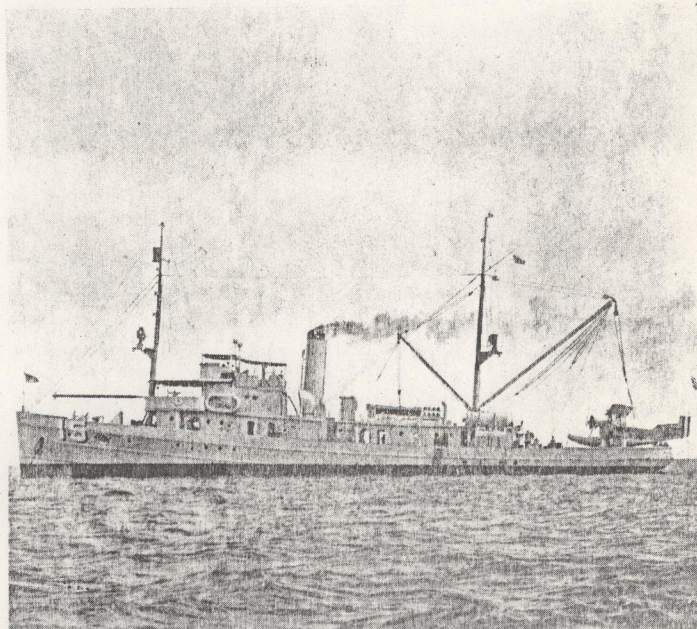
—All photos by U. S. Army Air Corps.





—Pearl Harbor Fleet Air Base Photos.

*Captain K. Whiting, USN, Commanding Officer  
of the Fleet Air Base, Pearl Harbor.*



*First section of naval aerial squadron passing over Punchbowl,  
extinct volcanic crater in Honolulu, enroute to Pearl Harbor after  
non-stop flight from San Francisco. The USS Quail anchored at  
French Frigates Shoal. An observation plane is perched on the  
fantail.*



In May, 1931, Headquarters 18th Composite Wing was created, with station at Fort Shafter, T. H. Command of the 18th Composite Wing, Air Corps, comprising all Army Air Corps units in the Hawaiian Islands, was given to Lieutenant Colonel Gerald C. Brant, Air Corps, upon the original organization of the Wing in 1931. In July, 1934, Lieut. Colonel Brant returned to the mainland, and was succeeded in command of the Wing by Lieutenant Colonel Delos E. Emmons, Air Corps. On June 12, 1936, Congressional action bestowed the rank of Brigadier General upon Wing Commanders of the Air Corps, and Lieut. Colonel Emmons was one of several distinguished officers promoted to that rank. His tour of duty in the Hawaiian Department expired in July 1936, and he returned to the mainland. Brigadier General Barton K. Yount, Air Corps, having been selected by the War Department to command the 18th Composite Wing, succeeded Brigadier General Emmons, arrived in Hawaii on September 12, 1936, and assumed command of the Wing. These three commanders of army air forces in Hawaii also acted as Department Air Officers.

During 1935 important acquisition of property for a new Army Bombing Base was completed, and late in the year, an initial allotment of funds to start construction was received. The property acquired is situated about seven miles northwest of Honolulu, on the shore line. It is destined to be turned into the most important unit of aerial defense in the islands. The new bombing base, to be named *Hickam Field* in commemoration of Lieutenant Colonel Horace M. Hickam, Air Corps, who was killed in an airplane accident at Fort Crockett, Texas, on November 5, 1934, will become the home station of an entire Wing, consisting of two Groups, each Group containing one Headquarters Squadron, four Bombardment Squadrons, and one Service Squadron. The Hawaiian Air Depot, which is the source of supply for all Air Corps units in the islands and also the shops where all airplanes receive major overhauls, will also be located at Hickam Field.

Under the command of Major General Hugh A. Drum, commanding the Hawaiian Department, the year 1937 finds the Army Air Corps in Hawaii operating a number of modern, high speed attack, bombardment and long-range observation airplanes. Although in the past the Wing has operated under numerous handicaps due to lack of proper equipment and insufficient personnel, it has throughout the years of its existence steadily advanced the cause of aviation in Hawaii. Continuous, comprehensive ground and

air training under principles contained in War Department and Hawaiian Department training directives, cooperation with other branches of the service in their training, and participation in Hawaiian Department maneuvers, have insured a high standard of efficiency, and the Army Air Corps is always prepared to fulfill its assigned emergency mission in the Hawaiian Islands.

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Winging their way swiftly over the blue waters of the Pacific, six flying boats of VP Squadron 10-F under the command of Lieutenant Commander Knefler McGinnis departed from San Francisco on January 10, 1934 at 2:10 P. M., and 24 hours and 50 minutes later set their noses down on the calm waters of Pearl Harbor in Honolulu, thus completing the greatest non-stop formation flight in the history of aviation. Word was flashed around the world of this mighty achievement of the pilots of the U. S. Navy, and another squadron was added to the Naval Fighting Forces of the Fleet Air Base in the Hawaiian Islands.



Admiral Orin G. Murfin, Commandant, 14th Naval District.

Snuggled compactly on a tract of land of approximately 15 acres on Ford's Island, the Naval Fleet Air Base, comprising 1200 enlisted men, 80 officers, and approximately 200 civilian employees, today constitutes a substantial factor in the economic life of the Territory.

Throughout its history the Naval Aeronautical organization in the Hawaiian Area has taken a prominent part in the historic flights of civilian aircraft and in furthering the interests of the territory. Weather forecasts, and more substantial assistance in many cases, were rendered upon the occasions of the Dole Flight, the historic flight of Smith and Bronte, the flight of Kingsford-Smith in the "Southern Cross," the subsequent flight of that officer in the "Lady Southern Cross," the flight of Amelia Earhart, and the P. A. A. mail and passenger service from the Coast. Inter-island flights have been made on numerous occasions to render emergency aid in case of distressed shipping, to assist in serious emergencies ashore, for photographing inaccessible areas, for transporting government officials and prominent



visiting citizens, for observing and photographing volcanic outbursts, and innumerable other purposes. The Fleet Air Base activities have provided a background for the successful operation and invaluable services rendered by Inter-Island Airways to the people of the Territory. The Base comprises one of the most important facilities of the Naval Aeronautical organization and is a major factor in the plans for national defense.

Naval Aeronautical activities at Pearl Harbor began in September, 1919 when a small group of officers and men comprising the Pacific Air Detachment established a temporary base alongside Torpedo Pier No. 3 in the Navy Yard, Pearl Harbor. Planes of the N-9 training type were stored in canvas hangars and launched over rough wooden runways; personnel were quartered on the old monitor "*Monterey*."

In 1921 the construction of improvements on Ford's Island was started and in 1923 aviation activities were moved to the present site. Flying equipment by that time had increased to include four H-S-2-L single engine flying boats, two R-6-L twin-float single engine tractor biplane torpedo planes, one N-9 training seaplane and one JN-6 land plane.

After the visit of the fleet units and Rear Admiral W. A. Moffett, Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics, in 1925, additional expansion of the Naval Air Station was planned. A new hangar was built in 1926, but the present modern assembly and repair shops and large seaplane hangar were not constructed until 1931. Another seaplane hangar was started in 1934, together with a large extension to the aircraft storehouse. In 1935 a modern reinforced concrete barracks for 1200 men was started, and additional structures, including a boat house, fire engine house, store house for inflammables, apartment houses for married chief petty officers, and quarters for officers were authorized.

An important factor in the promotion of aeronautical activities in the Pacific, the U. S. Navy has always played a gallant part, and so it is worthy for the reader to note the following chronology of naval aviation in the Pacific with special reference to the Hawaiian Area:

- 1903—Approximately fifteen (15) acres on Ford's Island, the nucleus of the present Fleet Air Base, acquired by the United States, together with the other portions of the Pearl Harbor naval reservation.
- 1911—Lieutenant T. G. Ellyson, U. S. Navy, ordered to the camp of Glenn H. Curtiss at North Island, Coronado, California, for flight training.

- 1917—Naval Air Station under command of Lieutenant E. W. Spencer, U. S. Navy, established at North Island, Coronado, California.
- 1919—First Pacific air detachment under command of Lieutenant Commander R. D. Kirkpatrick, U. S. Navy, arrived Pearl Harbor and established a temporary base at the Navy Yard.
- 1920—First inter-island flight in the Hawaiian Area by Navy seaplane was made.
- 1921—Patrol squadrons of the Battle Fleet, under command of H. C. Mustin, flew from San Diego to Panama, in easy stages, to participate in fleet maneuvers.  
Construction of buildings commenced at the Naval Air Station, Ford's Island, Pearl Harbor.
- 1922—Commander John Rodgers relieved Lieutenant Commander R. D. Kirkpatrick in command of Naval Air Station, Pearl Harbor.
- 1923—Fleet Air Base (then Naval Air Station) on Ford's Island occupied.  
Reconnaissance of Johnston Island made by four planes operating from the U. S. WHIP-POORWILL.
- 1924—Seaplane from the Naval Air Station, Pearl Harbor, operating from the U. S. S. PELICAN photographed reefs and islands Northwest of Kauai.
- 1925—Lieutenant Commander Millington B. McComb, U. S. Navy, relieved Commander John Rodgers in command of the Naval Air Station, Pearl Harbor.  
Aircraft squadrons of the Scouting Force and Battle Force, on the U. S. S. WRIGHT and U. S. S. JASON respectively, arrived in the Hawaiian Area in April for maneuvers in that vicinity.  
Three patrol planes of the Battle Force, under the command of the late Captain (then Commander) John Rodgers, attempted a non-stop flight from San Francisco to Hawaii. PN-9 No. 3 was forced down by an oil leak off the California Coast. PB-1 No. 2 failed to get off. PN-9 No. 1 encountered head winds and landed short of its destination. After floating for ten days, lost to the world, it was picked up off Nawiliwili and towed safely to Honolulu.
- 1926—First mapping expedition sent from San Diego to Alaska at the request of the Department of the Interior.
- 1927—Lieutenant Commander M. B. McComb killed in crash off Oahu. Commander V. D. Herbster, U. S. Navy, reported in January, 1928, to assume command.  
Smith-Bronte non-stop flight from Oakland to Molokai.  
Dole Prize Race from Oakland, California, to Honolulu.  
Captain C. Kingsford-Smith in the "Southern Cross" flew from Oakland, California, to Sydney, Australia.
- 1929—Another photographic mapping expedition sent to Alaska for the Department of the Interior.
- 1931—Commander E. W. Tod, U. S. Navy, assumed command of the Naval Air Station, Pearl Harbor.



1932—Aircraft squadrons of the Scouting Force flew in several stages from Panama to San Diego. Fleet Units visited Hawaiian Area. Status of Naval Air Station changed to Fleet Air Base.

U. S. S. AVOCET arrived from Asiatic Station to join the U. S. S. PELICAN as seaplane tender attached to the Fleet Air Base, Pearl Harbor.

1933—Aircraft Base Force established; Fleet Air Base, Pearl Harbor, attached to that command. Aircraft squadrons, which had flown to San Diego the previous year, returned to Panama stopping at La Paz, Acapulco, and Corinto, en route.

U. S. S. LEXINGTON visited Hawaiian Area in connection with fleet problem off the Pacific Coast.

VP Squadron 8-F arrived from Panama via U. S. S. WRIGHT for station at Pearl Harbor.

VP Squadron 10-F flew from Panama to San Diego via Acapulco, Mexico.

1934—VP Squadron 10-F flew non-stop from San Francisco to Pearl Harbor for station at Fleet Air Base.

Patrol Squadrons 7 and 9 flew from San Diego to Panama to participate in fleet problem in the Caribbean. After return to San Diego they departed for maneuvers in the Alaskan Area during the summer.

Mapping expedition under Rear Admiral Sinclair Gannon on the U. S. S. OGLALA operated in Alaskan and Aleutian Islands Area.

U. S. S. SWAN arrived Pearl Harbor for station.

Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith in "Lady Southern Cross" flew from Brisbane, Australia, to Oakland, California.

Extensive search made by aircraft units of Fleet Air Base for the late Captain C. T. P. Ulm in the "Star of Australia." Area covered

exceeded that searched in 1925 for PN-9 No. 1 but search was fruitless.

1935—Fleet problem held in Hawaiian Area, aircraft squadrons from Pearl Harbor operating from Midway.

Captain Kenneth Whiting, U. S. Navy, relieved Commander Tod in command of Fleet Air Base and attached units.

Amelia Earhart flew alone from Pearl Harbor to San Francisco, California.

By executive order of President Roosevelt it was provided that the joint flying field on Ford's Island known as Luke Field, and the Army Air Corps station of the same name, should be transferred to the Navy Department for expansion of Fleet Air Base facilities, contingent upon provision of alternate facilities on Oahu for the Air Corps units displaced thereby. Hickam Field, just Waikiki of the Navy Yard, was already under construction, completion expected in about four years.

Inaugural experimental flight of P. A. A. Clipper arrived from San Francisco and based at Fleet Air Base.

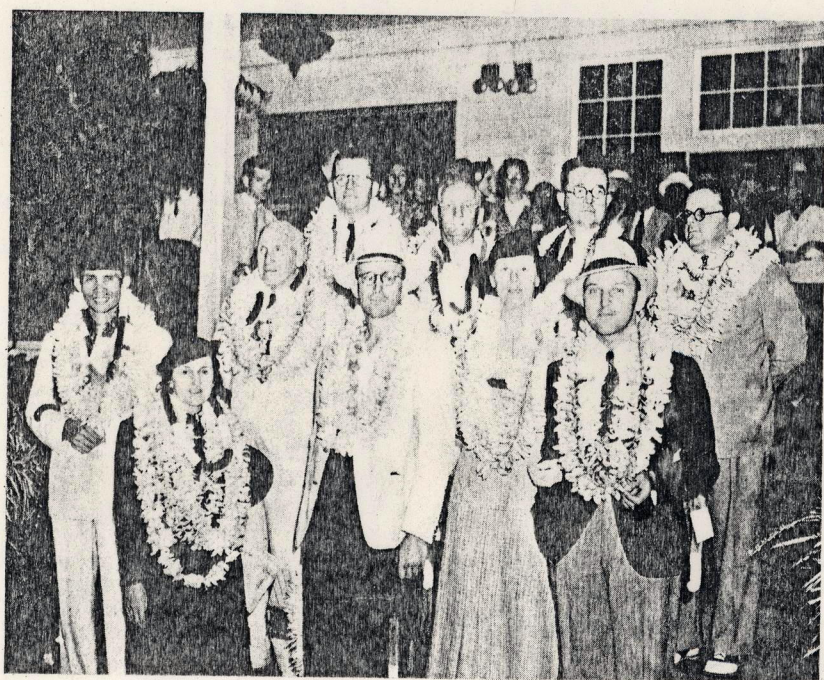
The longest non-stop flight made in a seaplane was completed by Lieutenant Commander Knefler McGinnis and a crew of five in a flight of 3387 miles from Panama to Alameda, California, in 34 hours and 45 minutes.

1936—Various units of the fleet visited Pearl Harbor. VO (Battleship Observation) Wing based at Fleet Air Base.

Squadrons from San Diego conducted another flight to the Alaskan Area.

Extended operations from the Fleet Air Base conducted in the sector from Oahu to Midway to Palmyra Island.

And so throughout the world, be it by sea or by air, wherever men struggle for a common achievement, for the betterment of civilization, the U. S. Navy leads the way.



First "pay" passengers who inaugurated the transpacific flight. Left to right, first row—Dr. H. C. Moncado, Mrs. Zetta Averill, Col. Charles Bartley, Wilbur May, Mrs. Clara Adams, Richard Bradley. Second row—Edward B. Brier, Ludwig Weinheimer, Herbert C. Shipman and George Carter, Jr. Thomas F. Ryan and Alfred Bennet, also passengers, are missing in this picture which was taken in Honolulu.