

Frank Hawks—the Record Breaker

An intimate biographical sketch of the man who by his spectacular record flights, has made his name a household word throughout the country.

by WALTER RALEIGH

"DO I like to fly? Sure, if I can fly fast.

"I certainly don't enjoy monkeyshines in the air. I think flights over oceans in land planes are as foolish as a transcontinental flight over the Rockies and plains and Alleghanies would be in a flying boat.

"What I like is fast cross-country flying."

That's the opinion of Frank Monroe Hawks who in the last year has made six transcontinental records and who has crossed the 2,500 miles of country faster than any other human in the world's history.

"What's the use," he says, "of loafing along at one hundred miles an hour? That's tiresome. It is worse than that. It is silly and foolish. Aviation to be worth anything must be fast. You can't see the earth go by at one hundred miles an hour. I want to see the country slip past."

While Hawks is the speed burner of the ozone, he is also an aviator with plenty of experience in other kinds of flying. As with many famous and less well known characters he learned to manipulate a plane by learning the machine end.

As a boy of eighteen he hung about the battered old wreck that a pioneer

of the barnstorming days manipulated in Long Beach, California, taking passengers aloft for a few fleeting minutes at a price of fifteen to twenty-five dollars a flight. Young Hawks didn't have any money to go up as a passenger, and it was probably just as well.

The typical "haywire" outfit operated by this pioneer airman by the name of Christopherson was an old "pusher." It was patched and re-patched. The pilot sat on the leading edge of the lower wing, his feet resting on nothing at all. In back of him was his engine. About him were his controls that had to be operated by his hands, feet and body. Alongside of him was a tiny seat just large enough to hold a passenger if the passenger wasn't too big.

That was in 1916. But in 1916 they were standing in line for a chance to see the country looking down. Young Hawks stood in line too. Every day for several days he was in the line, but he never got in the plane, for he simply didn't have the price.

One night he had a brilliant idea of how to get a ride with Christopherson. He thought it out as he lay in bed wishing that he could flirt with the clouds and the birds. The idea was all right except that it was based on a falsehood, but the driving desire to fly overlooked that item.



Frank Monroe Hawks

The next morning bright and early young Hawks appeared at the rutty flying field on the outskirts of Long Beach. He was there before Christopherson. When the barnstormer appeared Hawks went boldly up to him:

"I have no money," he began, "but I certainly want an airplane ride."

"Yea," replied the pioneer of the skies, the statement of the young man not being at all new in that day or this day either for that matter.

"I want to make a trade with you," Hawks continued as he screwed up his courage. "It's this: If I write a story about a flight in your plane for my paper you will get more business and I will have the ride."

It sounded all right to Christopherson. "All right," he accepted, "I'll take you up."

THAT was Hawks' first airplane ride. It didn't last but a few minutes; just off the ground, up a ways, and down again. It was mostly filled with vibration and engine roar and hanging on, but it was aviation. However, it was enough for Hawks. He was sold on flying.

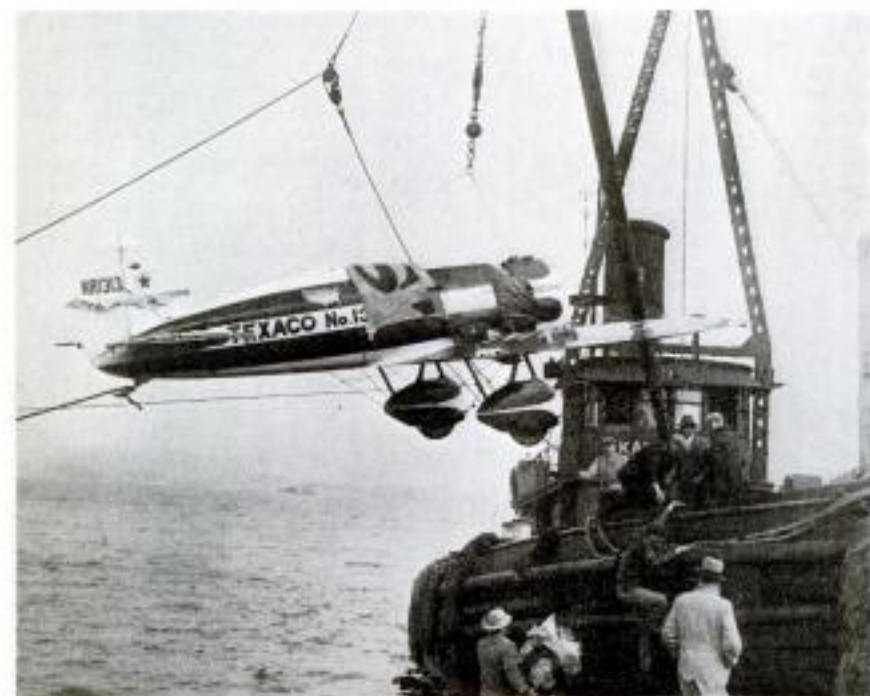
Then his conscience began troubling him. He was no reporter and he wasn't writing stories for papers. He had paid for his ride with a document that might be termed a false pretense.

"It bothered me and worried me a lot, the more I thought of it," he said. "Christopherson had played fair and I hadn't. I decided to try and square myself, so I went down the next morning and told him that I had cheated him. He was very decent.

"I told him that as long as I could not pay for the ride with either cash or publicity, I would be willing to work it

(Continued on page 57)

Here is the famous "Texaco 15" being loaded on board ship for Europe where Hawks is now setting new speed records.



Frank Hawks

(Continued from page 23)

out, and I was thankful when he agreed to the proposal."

It was in just that fashion that the present speed-burner across the country became initiated into aviation. He helped to patch up leaky radiators. He spread varnish and dope and sewed fabric. He changed spark plugs and dug into magnetos, and he made himself so useful that he obtained more rides and was even allowed to take the stick in the air upon occasions.

Aviation claimed Hawks from that time on. Not that he gave up everything else, but his mind's eye was focussed on air, plus speed. As a student he went in for speedy sports, sprinting and racing. He ran the twenty in nearly record time.

Then came the war—and more aviation. Having been an engineering student at the University of California he got through the ground school promptly and went to Brooks Field, Dallas. It took but three and one-half hours of instructions to give him his first solo.

Later he was made an instructor. He had the ability of teaching others to fly and he did it so well that he never was allowed to go to France, but while his heart was overseas he was circling around in "Jennies" at sixty to seventy miles an hour. It didn't appeal, so he resigned his captain's commission.

As nearly every flyer knows, once you have looked out over the countryside from a pilot's seat high up in the blue, nothing on the ground exactly satisfies. So with Hawks. He went to barnstorming with a group who had bought up a fleet of war training planes.

"I would have had a nice flight with my first passenger load," he recalled, "except for a board fence. I never saw a plane rolled up in a ball before with passengers and airplane all mixed together. That airplane was completely washed out. I struck the fence with my landing gear and down we came on the other side! But the strange thing about it was that no one was seriously hurt."

There was a long period of barnstorming, a school that is unequaled perhaps for training aviators, for they must know their machine and they must have confidence. This barnstorming took him to Mexico with other gypsy fliers and there he was associated with Augie Pedlar, pilot of Miss Doran in the Dole race in 1927, who was lost at sea with his plane and passengers. Pedlar, doubled as a mechanic and wing walker and did other stunts.

IT WAS after this that racing came to be the big thing to Frank Hawks, but this did not entirely satisfy.

"It was not fast enough and I turned to something else," he says. "I felt that a big opportunity could be found with some large commercial company, both to earn a good living and sell aviation to executives who are in a position to make good use of it."

It was in this selling of speed in the air that he made his first trip east from Los Angeles and set his first transcontinental record of 18 hours and 22 minutes.

The flight started on an evening in February, 1929. In the cabin was Oscar Grubb, tucked in among seventy-five five-gallon tins and armed with a pair of tin shears and a hand pump. Grubb's job was to pump the fuel by hand into the wing tanks, and then, in order to make more room for himself, to cut up the tins into strips and store them in the plane. The fear that the empties might strike and injure some one on the ground prevented him from throwing them overboard.

It was winter weather and the plane was an open-cockpit job. Up to 15,000 feet he went and stayed there. As he fought his way eastward the clouds increased until a blanket of 8,000 feet thick was between him and the earth. He felt that he would find better going north and he "crabbed" in that direction. He saw no land from West Texas until he reached some point east of the Mississippi. It was a great blanket of clouds over which he flew.

It was time to find out his location so he dropped down through more than a mile of clouds and fog only to encounter a cold, driving snowstorm. The land beneath looked like Kentucky and that was too far south. Up again with a course headed due north.

After an hour or so another trip down through the white blanket and this time the terrain reminded him of West Virginia. This time he flew beneath the blanket, twisting and winding up valleys and between mountains, working his way northward until he landed at Roosevelt Field.

"It was not so bad," he said. "I thought we might make it and I thought too, that we might have to land. I wanted to make the flight to impress the executives of my own company who were still to be convinced of the value of cross country, high speed flying. This flight helped a lot."

This record, however, was quickly broken, and Hawks remained comparatively out of the aviation spotlight until June 27, 1929. On that date, flying alone and in the same high wing monoplane in which he had established his first record, he traveled non-stop from New York to Los Angeles in 19 hours, 10 minutes, and on the following day he returned non-stop in 17 hours, 36 minutes. He had gone from coast to coast in 36 hours, 44 minutes, which gave him the cross-country laurels east and west and the round trip record.

These records continued to be recognized officially even after other fliers had made better time through the advantage of refueling stops midway at Wichita, Kansas, but as in the case of loss of his first transcontinental record, Hawks wasted no time redeeming what these competitors had taken from him.

He personally supervised the construction of a low-wing monoplane ca-

pable of a high speed of approximately 250 miles an hour, and in August of 1930 he flew from New York to Los Angeles, making five stops, in 14 hours, 30 minutes, 43 seconds. A week later he returned, making three stops, in 12 hours, 25 minutes, 3 seconds.

Subsequently Hawks flew his winged torpedo between scores of American and Canadian cities, establishing informal records between many of his takeoff and landing points. Outstanding among these flights were trips from Detroit to New York, 640 miles, in 2 hours, 41 minutes, averaging about 255 miles an hour, then an unofficial world record for speed and distance; Philadelphia to New York, 90 miles, in 20 minutes, averaging four and a half miles a minute. Many of these flights were made in 1930 for which year Hawks was chosen America's outstanding flier by the Ligue Internationale des Aviateurs.

Captain Hawks is now in Europe for an extended flying tour.

The announcement of the trip said that "the tour is being made for purely business reasons, especially to permit Captain Hawks to consult with foreign airplane and petroleum technicians, to permit him to inspect the European airports and transport lines, and to attend the International Aircraft Show in Stockholm during the week of May 15."

But from the reports that are coming back regarding the way in which this speed king is burning up the Continental airways, it seems certain that before this summer is over, there will be new records in the crown of this super-man who rides "sitting on the wind."

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