



Montgomery Flight – 1904



Moffett Field – 1933



China Clipper – 1936



Hiller XH-44 – 1944



NASA Ames Research Center -- 1981

Northern Wings

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How U-2 spy flights kept watchful eye on Soviets

Ex-CIA pilot recounts Cold War missions



U-2 spyplane in flight

In the mid-1950s, as the Cold War escalated between the United States and the Soviet Union, American leaders worried about a “bomber gap” between the two nuclear-armed nations.

Which nation’s air force could deliver the biggest nuclear punch – the United States’ fleet of B-52 and B-47 bombers or the Soviet Union’s growing armada of “Bison” bombers – was the big unanswered question.

It took a super-secret aircraft and the daring pilots who flew them to provide the answer.

Martin A. Knutson, former Air Force fighter pilot and retired chief of flight operations for NASA’s Ames Research Center, was among the first group of CIA pilots who flew the U-2 spyplanes high over the Soviet Union to investigate the nuclear threat.

Knutson, a Los Altos resident, was the honored speaker at the Spring Luncheon of the Aero Club of Northern California. The club presented Knutson with a National Aeronautic Association Certificate of Honor.

Flying more than 70,000 feet above the Russian heartland, too high for

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-- Northern Wings photo

Martin Knutson operates slide projector at Aero Club luncheon

James Nissen Terminal taking shape at San Jose Airport

The airline passenger terminal of the future is taking shape at Mineta San Jose International Airport.

Construction workers this spring began assembling the distinctive steel frame for the North Concourse of the James M. Nissen Terminal complex. The facility is expected to be in service by 2010.

The North Concourse is the first

phase of a \$1.5 billion plan to expand and upgrade San Jose’s terminal facilities, some of which date to 1965.

Designed by the Gensler architectural firm, the North Concourse will have nine airline gates and new dining and retail services. It features a “paseo” concept -- large open spaces, an airy walkway and a

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-- Northern Wings photo

North Concourse construction

Board profile

Oberg's brief role in SJC's history

In the late 1940s, Harold Oberg had resumed his civilian flying career after military service as a ferry pilot in World War II when he got a call from Jim Nissen, who ran a little flying operation in San Jose.

"He says come to San Jose and do a little business, and before the day was over, I owned California Aviation Activities and all the airplanes and shop tools,"



Harold Oberg

Oberg, a member of the Board of Directors of the Aero Club of Northern California, recalled.

So Oberg became a fixed base operator at what was evolving into San Jose Municipal Airport. He stayed, as he recalled "about a week and a half." The facilities were too small and the city "wouldn't spend a penny to help an FBO." Oberg moved his newly acquired assets to Salinas, where he already had a flight business.

Nissen, a former Navy flier and research test pilot, became San Jose's first airport manager. Over the next 30 years he built much of what today is Mineta San Jose International Airport.

Oberg went on to run his fixed base operations at Salinas, King City and Paso Robles, fly crop dusters and airliners, and serve 37 years in the Air National Guard.

When he returned from World War II, Oberg had gone to work for the man who taught him to fly in 1940. He soon bought the business, operating 18 new Aeroncas for flight training and three twin Beechcrafts for charter work. He renamed it Valley Flying Service.

But the Korean war broke out, "and my pilots kept getting recalled" to active military duty, Oberg said. "I was having the usual fight with landlords so I just got tired and quit" in 1956.

Oberg also flew airliners in California and from Florida across the Atlantic. He ran his crop dusting business in the Salinas Valley from 1959 to 1978, then retired from commercial flying.

SJC begins new terminal construction

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canopy that will let natural light flood the interior in daytime.

Airport officials said the steel work is expected to be completed this summer. The building will be completed over the next three years, and will include systems for airline and security operations.

Late this summer, the first phase of construction to replace the 1965-vintage Terminal C is scheduled to begin. The building's south end will be temporarily modified and the north end will be taken out of service for demolition this fall.

As the work progresses, airline gates and operations will be moved to the North Concourse and a modified Terminal A. Eventually, Terminal C will be replaced by a new Terminal B.

The terminal complex is named for James M. Nissen, the city's first aviation manager who between 1945 and 1975 built much of the airport. The San Jose City Council approved the honor for Nissen at the request of the Aero Club of Northern California.

CALENDAR OF AVIATION EVENTS

Vertical Challenge

June 16 at the Hiller Aviation Museum, San Carlos Airport. Seventh Annual "Vertical Challenge" helicopter air show. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Information at www.hiller.org/vertical-challenge.shtml

Palo Alto Airport Day

Sept. 9, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. open house at Palo Alto Airport, Palo Alto. Information at www.paloaltoairport.org.

Reno National Championship Air Races

Sept. 12-16, Reno Stead Airport, Reno, Nev. Information at www.airrace.org.

Reid-Hillview Airport Day

Sept. 22 at Reid-Hillview Airport, San Jose. Open house, aircraft displays, food, airplane rides.

California International Airshow Salinas

Sept. 28-30 at Salinas Municipal Airport, Salinas. The U.S. Navy Blue Angels and Canadian Snowbirds jet demonstration teams will perform. Information at www.salinasairshow.com.

Fleet Week

Oct. 4-9 in San Francisco.

The Blue Angels will fly air shows on Oct. 6 and 7. Information at www.fleetweek-us/

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The risky missions of high-flying U-2 spyplanes

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Soviet interceptors to fly or surface-to-air missiles to reach, Knutson shot the picture that helped disprove the bomber gap.

The photo showed the entire fleet of Myasishchev M-4 Molot (Hammer) intercontinental strategic bombers, code-named "Bison," neatly lined up at a single Soviet air base. Flights by U-2 pilots over other Soviet bases showed no Bisons. So the total was a little more than 30. There was no gap.

But for several more years, the CIA spy flights continued to document the Soviet missile and nuclear weapons programs.

Both nations publicly pretended these flights did not occur. The United States did not want to acknowledge sending spy planes over the Soviet Union, nor did the Soviets want to admit that their aircraft and missiles could not reach the heights where the U-2s flew with impunity.

But the spy pilots always had company during their overflights, Knutson said. A cloud of Soviet fighter planes escorted them – thousands of feet below.

There were so many, Knutson said, that when a new Soviet missile shot down U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers

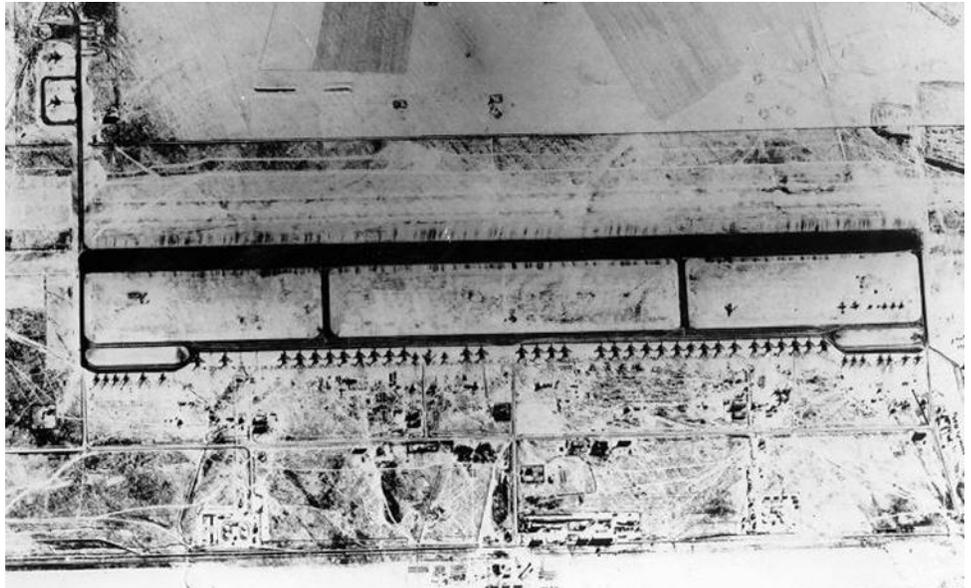


Photo from Knutson mission shows entire fleet of Soviet Bison bombers



U-2 in Air Force markings

on May 1, 1960, the falling wreckage took out two Soviet aircraft below.

The Powers incident brought the overflights into the open – and to an end. An embarrassed President



Bison intercontinental bomber

Dwight Eisenhower promised the Soviets there would be no more overflights of USSR territory.

Knutson flew Korean War combat missions in F-84 Thunderjets, then was assigned as a Strategic Air Force fighter pilot. He joined the CIA in 1956 and also played a pivotal role in the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

In 1971, Knutson joined NASA at Ames Research Center at Moffett field as manager of the NASA's Airborne Instrumentation Research Project. He continued flying U-2's, logging more than 4,000 hours in all versions over the years.

From 1975 to 1984, Knutson was chief of NASA-Ames Airborne Missions and Application Division, then became site manager at the NASA-Ames Dryden Research facility at Edwards Air Force Base. He became chief of flight operations at NASA-Ames in 1990 and retired in 1997.



-- Northern Wings photo

Director Jim Ricklefs shares a laugh with Martin Knutson

History Corner

Lincoln Beachey's daring flights thrilled millions

Lincoln Beachey was probably the most famous person no one knows – at least today. But nearly a century ago, Beachey was the most skilled and popular among the daredevil fliers who astounded millions in aviation's infancy. He was known as the "man who owns the sky."

Even Orville Wright respected Beachey's skill. Wright was quoted as saying, "An aeroplane in the hands of Lincoln Beachey is poetry. His mastery is a thing of beauty to watch. He is the most wonderful flyer of all."

Beachey was the first pilot to fly upside down and the first American to fly a loop. On June 27, 1911, he flew through a drizzle over Niagara Falls, then under the "Honeymoon Bridge" 20 feet above the rapids. He raced a train in Chicago, touching his wheels on top of the moving cars as it passed beneath.

Born on March 3, 1887 in San Francisco, Beachey ran his own bicycle shop at age 13, and repaired motorcycles at 15. He became a dirigible pilot. In 1910, he learned to fly fixed-wing aircraft at the Curtiss Flying School, operated by Glenn Curtiss, the arch-rival of the Wright Brothers. He joined the Curtiss team of stunt fliers.

By the end of 1911, he was aviation's greatest moneymaker, and at his peak Beachey raked in more in a single day than the national average annual income.

Ever the showman, Beachey wore a business suit, diamond stickpin and a checkered golf cap when he flew. Other pilots of the era wore leather coats, helmets and boots.

A French pilot had flown the first loop in 1913. So Beachey designed and built a new aircraft, the "Little Looper" in which he would fly as many as 80 consecutive loops. But Beachey's stunt signature was the "dip-of-



Lincoln Beachey at controls of his "Little Looper."

death." He would climb to 5,000 feet, and dive toward the ground at full speed with his hands outstretched. At the last second, he would level out hands-off, gripping the control stick with his knees.

Some aviation researchers have estimated that Beachey thrilled more than 17 million spectators in 126 cities from November 1913 to November 1914.

In 1914, Beachey ordered a new Taube monoplane with an 80-horsepower engine to fly upside-down, a maneuver he had not yet shown to the public. On March 14, 1915, at the Panama-Pacific International Exhibition in San Francisco, Beachey took the plane up before 50,000 people, flew a loop and then turned inverted.

But the aircraft was sinking. When he tried to pull out of inverted flight, the strain caused both wings to shear off, and Beachey plunged to his death in the bay. He was 28.

The Aero Club of Northern California

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Chartered in 1981 as a chapter of the
National Aeronautic Association



- To keep the public informed of the importance of aviation and space flight to the nation's economic progress, its security, and to international understanding.
- To support a vigorous aviation and space education program for students at all levels of learning.
- To recognize and honor those who make outstanding contributions to the advancement of aviation and space flight.