

Sikorsky Archives News

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R-4 Showed The Way in 1942



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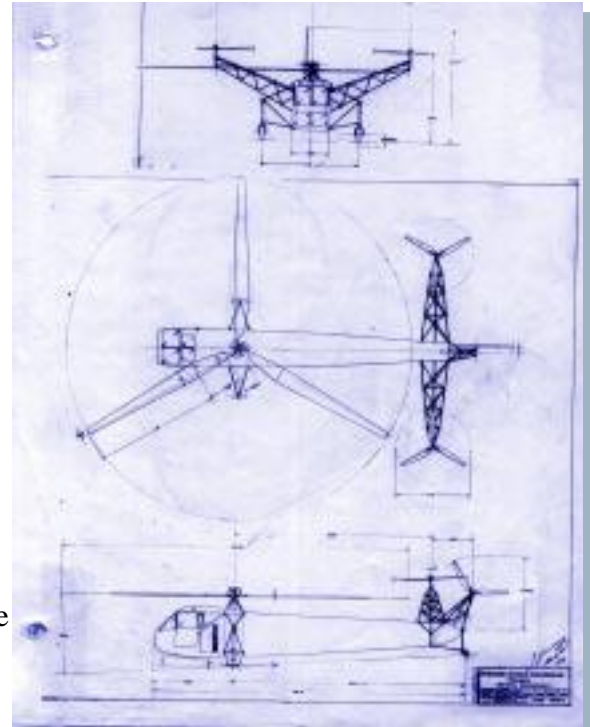


The Sikorsky VS-316 (XR-4) embodied all that had been learned with the VS-300. Powered by a Warner R-550-1 of 185 Horsepower, it cruised at 65mph, and had a range of 200 miles. This photo was taken during trials aboard the SS Bunker Hill in May 1943.

Initial Rollout.



Right: The original design, conceived while the outcome of two-axis main rotor cyclic control testing on the VS-300 was not yet certain.



The XR-4, ready to be all it could be.

Right: Early Coastguard training realizes the Igor Sikorsky dream of the helicopter as a rescuer of lives. In the original photo, the USCG pilot Commander Frank Ericson has a look of intense concentration; the R-4 was not easy to fly, in the days before automatic flight controls.

"It would be right to state that, with the successful flight of the XR-4 in the summer of 1942, the helicopter became a reality in the United States"

- Igor Sikorsky, "The Story of the Winged S"



Personalities

LtoR: Connie Moeller, Jimmy Viner, Ralph Lightfoot, Priscilla Handy, Bob Nields, Harlow Smith, Maurice Bugby, Howie Hunter, Bob Decker.

Ralph Lightfoot was Chief of Flight Test and Priscilla Handy was a pilot trainee. Moeller, Viner, Nields, Bugby and Decker were test pilots. Smith and Hunter were Flight Test Engineers.



L-R Back: Col. Frank Gregory (in cockpit), Bob Labensky, Serge Gluhareff, Ed Walsh, C.L. "Les" Morris. Front: Ralph Alex, Michael Buiuid, George "Red" Lubben, Miles "Bud" Roosevelt, Adolph Plenefisch.



Igor Sikorsky at Wright Field with Orville Wright, following the cross country flight from Stratford to Wright Field to deliver the XR-4 to the Army.



L-R Back: Ed Ortlepp, Adolph Plenefisch. Center: Alex Krapish, Michael Buiuid, Igor I. Sikorsky, Ferrer "Fritz" Papini, Boris "Bob" Labensky, Walter Stens, Henry Wirkus. Front: Bob Kretvix, George "Red" Lubben, Miles "Bud" Roosevelt, Ed Walsh.

"The Work of the Individual is the Spark that drives Mankind ahead"

- Igor Sikorsky

Bunker Hill Trials

The work that led to the XR-4 and the first successful US Army trials was due to Igor Sikorsky and his team. However, the faith in Sikorsky shown by then Capt. H. Franklin Gregory USAAF charged by the Army to oversee all helicopter development, contributed greatly to ultimate acceptance of the new helicopter by all the US Services. Igor and General Gregory, as he later became, were lifelong friends.



Frank Gregory was involved with Army Rotary wing development during the gyroplane era, and was tasked with monitoring early helicopter development including the Platt-LePage XR-1, the VS-300, and the VS-316 which became the R-4. The picture shows the first XR-4 shipborne

trials in Long Island Sound with the SS Bunker Hill in May 1943.



Cross-Country From Stratford to Dayton Ohio

On May 13 1942, the XR-4 departed Stratford for Wright Field to begin Army trials, flown by C.L. "Les" Morris. The flight took five days, and broke many helicopter records, all unofficially. People at the various stops along the way were disbelieving when they saw an aircraft that could not only stop in mid-air, but also back up. This pioneering flight covered 761 miles in 16 separate flights. Total flight time was 16 hr. 10 minutes. Four states were covered; unofficial American air distance record repeatedly set, then exceeded, finishing at 92 air miles; other records broken unofficially; first interstate helicopter flights and passenger flights; and World endurance Record of 1 hr 50 min. during one leg. Ed Walsh, Adolph Plenefisch, Ralph Alex and Bob Labensky followed the flight travelling in a car with a yellow spot painted on the roof. At the end of each day they gave the helicopter a thorough inspection.



ROUTE OF XR-4 HELICOPTER DELIVERY FLIGHT, MAY 13-18, 1942.

Wright Field 18 May 1942. L-R: Ed Walsh, Adolph Plenefisch, Igor I Sikorsky, Orville Wright, Ralph Alex, C.L. "Les" Morris, Boris Labensky.

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The R-4 saw operational service in Burma towards the end of the war. Above, artist Andy Whyte has depicted a supply mission in progress in the Burmese jungle. Below, a rare photo taken in Burma. Military personnel inspect a newly arrived machine, the like of which they have never seen before.





Welcome New Members

Sikorsky Archives is pleased to welcome these new members who will help provide the means for future generations to acknowledge Sikorsky Aviation history.

Patricia O'Keefe
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