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Sikorsky Aircraft Cross the Atlantic

This issue of the newsletter recognizes the Anniversaries of: a VS-44A flying boat setting a record for crossing the Atlantic non-stop; two S-55 helicopters self-deploying to Europe; and two S-61 helicopters flying non-stop, to Paris.



75 Years Ago - VS-44A Makes the First Ever Non-Stop Trans-Atlantic Westbound Flight



65 Years Ago - Two S-55 (H-19A) Helicopters Self-Deploy to Europe



55 Years Ago - Two S-61 (HH-3E) Helicopters Fly Non-Stop to Europe, Using In-flight Refueling

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VS-44A

Operating the world's first nonstop westbound transatlantic crossing on June 22, 1942, the Vought-Sikorsky (VS)-44A "Excalibur" flew from Foynes, Ireland, a flying boat port on the River Shannon, to New York in 25 hours, 40 minutes with 16 passengers aboard. The crew included Pilot Charles Blair, Copilot Bob Hixon, Flight Engineer Mike Doyle, Navigator Harry Lamont, and Radioman Mike McFarlen.

This record setting flight was not a planned event. American Export Airlines inaugurated passenger service between New York and Foynes, Ireland on June 20, 1942 with an uneventful eastbound crossing which included a refueling stop at Botwood, Newfoundland, Canada. On the return flight to the new LaGuardia Marine Terminal the crew faced strong headwinds and fog that had socked in Newfoundland, the refueling point. Assessing their grim fuel outlook, co-pilot Bob Hixon remarked at one point, "Glad this is a boat." To stretch mileage, Captain Blair brought the VS-44A down to skim just above the waves. Flying in ground effect reduced fuel consumption but increased the danger of marine collisions. When the flying boat touched down on Flushing Bay, AEA publicists could claim the first Foynes-New York nonstop flight. Only 45 minutes' worth of fuel remained.



VS-44A at Marine Terminal LaGuardia

The last of the three VS-44s to be built, the Excambian, was damaged in 1969 and subsequently rebuilt by Sikorsky volunteers and is proudly displayed in the New England Air Museum in Windsor Locks, Ct.



Excambian before restoration



Excambian after restoration

S-55 (USAF H-19A) “Hop-A-Long and “Whirl-O-Way”



Hop-A-Long and Whirl-O-Way landing in Scotland after trans-Atlantic flight – September 2, 1952

On July 15 1952, two H-19A helicopters, christened Hop-A-Long (51-3893) and Whirl-O-Way (51-3890) with three 100 gallon auxiliary fuel tanks in the cabin and stripped of all unnecessary equipment, self-deployed from Westover AFB, Massachusetts to Wiesbaden AFB, Germany. This first transatlantic crossing by helicopter followed a great circle route via Presque Isle, Maine, Goose Bay, Labrador, Narsarsuaq, Greenland, Keflavik, Iceland and Prestwick, Scotland. After welcoming ceremonies in Scotland, the two helicopters continued on to Schiphol, Holland and arrived at Wiesbaden AFB, Germany on August 4, 1952. The longest leg of this trip was the 850 miles over water leg from Keflavik, Iceland to Prestwick, Scotland.

The first transatlantic helicopter crossing was an important test of the capabilities of rotorcraft to deploy rapidly over long distances. The man who would eventually lead the mission, Air Force Captain Vincent McGovern, proposed the idea. McGovern had been impressed by the specifications of the big new H-19. He first had the opportunity to fly the new helicopter in January 1951, and a year later, while serving in the headquarters of the Air Rescue Service, he formulated a plan to ferry two H-19s across the Atlantic.

Hop-A-Long and Whirl-O-Way were also shadowed by a C-54 transport, christened Playmate, carrying spare parts, mechanics, observers and the Sikorsky technical representative, Harry Hleva.

Forced back to Goose Bay three times by bad weather, and required to spend the night at an isolated Eskimo village near Cape Harrison, Labrador, McGovern and company set out on July 27 for Greenland. Narrowly missing an iceberg, the choppers landed on rocky icy Simiutak Island where their crews shared the hospitality of a remote Canadian radio outpost. The next day, the pair pressed on to Narsarssuak, Greenland and from there to Keflavik, Iceland, setting a nonstop helicopter distance record of 703.6 miles.



Route of H-19A
Transatlantic Flight



Igor Sikorsky and Sikorsky General
Manager Bernard Whelan wish
Crews a Safe Flight at Westover AFB

On the next day, July 31, the helicopters broke their own record, flying more than 800 miles nonstop from Keflavik to Prestwick Scotland. The 3,984 statute mile trip took 20 days and accounted for 51 hours, 55 minutes of flying time, hardly the speedy deployment McGovern had hoped to demonstrate. But the effort stands as a testimonial to four determined men and the helicopters they flew. The pilots were Captains Vincent McGovern, Harry Jeffers, George Hambrick, and Lt. Harold Moore.

S-61 (USAF HH-3E) Nonstop Atlantic Crossing

To commemorate the 40th anniversary of Charles Lindbergh's solo Transatlantic crossing, the U.S. Air Force organized the first non-stop helicopter flight across the Atlantic Ocean, from New York to Paris. Two U.S. Air Force Sikorsky HH-3E "Jolly Green Giant" search and rescue helicopters departed Naval Air Station, New York at Floyd Bennet Field on May 31st on their way to a 30 hour 46 minute flight to Paris. Refueled nine times each by HC-130P tanker aircraft at altitudes of between 1,000 and 9,000 feet and speeds of 125 mph, the helicopters landed at Le Bourget during the 27th Paris Air Show.



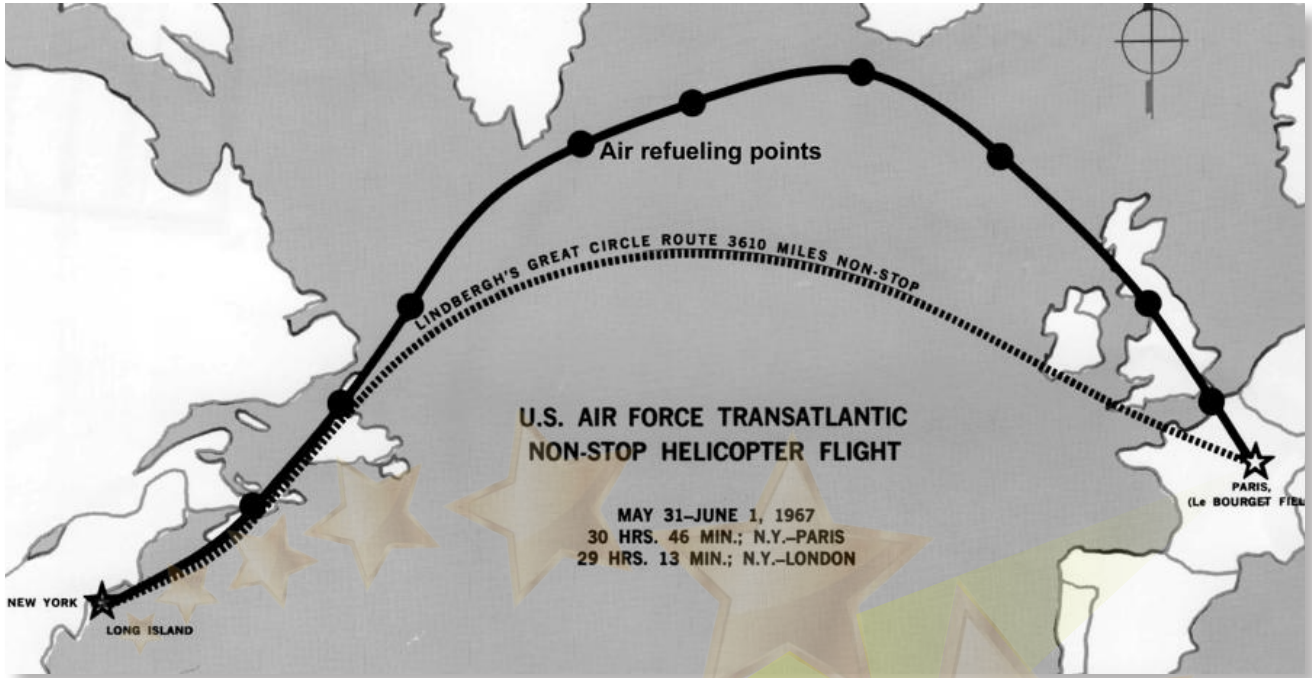
The First of Two HH-3E helicopters lands at LeBourget Airport June 1, 1967

The two helicopters took off at 1:06 AM New York time, in order to arrive at the Paris Air Show during the middle of "Helicopter Day" at 1:51 PM Paris time. Flying more northerly than Lindbergh's route to allow diversion to land if required. After the fourth refueling, east and south of Greenland, strong headwinds and icing conditions required the helicopters to descend to 1,000 feet and then 500 feet and finally to 50 feet to avoid icing conditions. Icebergs were a potential obstacle. Finally the weather improved and the HH-3Es climbed to a safer altitude for the fifth refueling off the coast of Iceland. After crossing the coast of Scotland the weather cooperated and provided a tailwind to boost the groundspeed to 170 mph.

Enroute to Paris, the two helicopters separated to allow the second HH-3E to overfly Heathrow Airport in London to record a New York to London time of 29 hours and 13 minutes. The first helicopter arrived over Paris with a HC-130P tanker and performed a refueling demo for the assembled crowds before landing. The first HH-3E landed at 1:53 PM in Paris 30 hours and 46 minutes after leaving New York (131 mph for 4270 miles).



The second HH-3E landed 12 minutes later. Among the welcoming committee were Igor Sikorsky and his son, Sergei Sikorsky.



Route of HH-3E Transatlantic Flight



Igor and his Son Sergei welcome the HH-3E crew at the Paris Air Show - 1967

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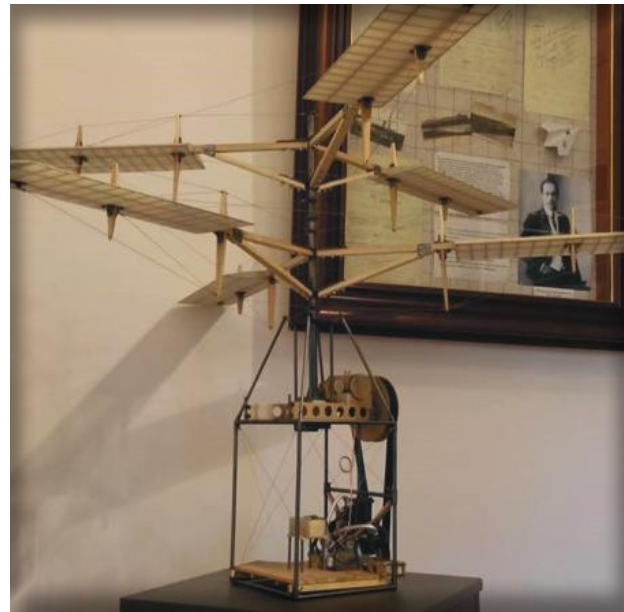
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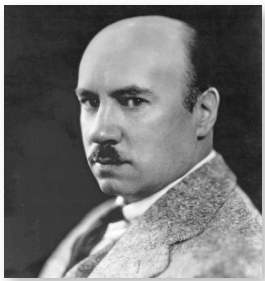
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H-2 model made for the "Our Sikorsky" exhibition in the Museum of Ukrainian diaspora in Kiev

Prepared by Venny Devine, Art Linden and John Bulakowski with graphic art and layout by Jodi Buckley



"I am proud to be an American because this great country always has been the traditional carrier of idealism, good will, and help all over the world wherever there is need or suffering. For myself and my four American-born sons, I am happy and proud to be a citizen of this great, powerful, free country that has no reason to envy or fear any country in the world."

Igor Sikorsky

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