



FÉDÉRATION AÉRONAUTIQUE INTERNATIONALE Ballooning Commission

Hall of Fame Nomination

Connie Wolf

Nationality: USA

Date of Birth: 1905

Year of Death: 1994

Biography:

Alfred L. and Constance C. Wolf

To refer to an individual as a pioneer is a lofty statement reserved for the very few. Yet how appropriate such a title is for the late Alfred L. "Abby" Wolf.

A lawyer who was first inspired by the heroics of Charles Lindbergh, Abby became interested in aviation and learned to fly, obtaining his license in 1929. Recognizing that as the new field of aviation grew there would be a need for changes in aviation laws and regulations, he began to specialize in this area of the law at his firm in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His avocation truly became his vocation as he helped shape the path of aviation law as we know it today.

The term pioneer is also often synonymous with freedom, and to Abby Wolf freedom was partly defined in terms of what we now call General Aviation: personal transportation in personal aircraft. In the true American tradition of pioneering and preservation of freedom, Mr. Wolf, along with four contemporaries, founded the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association in 1939 to assure representation for this segment of the flying community. This established a proper place for General Aviation to co-exist with the airlines and the military as America's airspace became more crowded and complex.

Mr. Wolf had a distinguished career in the United States Air Force, retiring with the rank of Brigadier General in 1964. His most notable accomplishment was overseeing the ferrying of more than 6,000 new combat aircraft into the Pacific Theater during World War II. During this exemplary period of service he accumulated several thousand flight hours and numerous ratings in aircraft ranging through helicopters, transports, and fighters. He soloed his first jet-powered aircraft at the age of 51, an act never before accomplished by any reserve officer.

Great lives often reflect great partnerships, and in the case of Abby Wolf his wife of 54 years, Constance Cann "Connie" Wolf, provided the ultimate complement to this adventurous and accomplished individual. Connie also caught the bug and learned to fly (her husband taught

her during their honeymoon). At one point much later in her life she was one of only five women in the entire world to possess a valid airman's certificate longer than fifty years.

Connie Wolf's true aviation passion was flight in balloons - and gas filled balloons in particular. She and Abby took their first balloon ride together in 1951 over Zurich, Switzerland. The thrill of that ride inspired a life-long passion for Connie, as an unusually subdued Abby found himself "huddling in the bottom of this miserable laundry basket." While Connie went on to perform various and well-publicized balloon flights, Abby returned to pilot all manner of powered aircraft, never setting foot in a balloon again.

Living at their farm homestead - aptly named "Wingover" in respect for their nearby home base, Wings Field in Ambler, Pennsylvania - the Wolfs directed their aviation, business, travel, and charitable activities. Connie had been a theatrical agent in New York prior to her marriage, an occupation that gave her access to many of the stars of the era. Many such luminaries of stage and screen attended the Wolf's famous "fly-in" parties at Wings Field. They pioneered this new social event, combining enthusiasm for aviation with friendly gatherings and festive occasions. This tradition of camaraderie continues today at small airports across the country.

Abby and Connie Wolf's life-long love of aviation, adventure, and public service was the guiding inspiration for the establishment of the Wolf Aviation Fund. The fund is administered to provide support for those who endeavor to perpetuate general aviation in such a manner as to "transcend the ordinary in order to be true to the spirit of the creators." Their marvelous pioneering spirit, love of aviation, and concern for the flying rights of the individual will be preserved and reflected in the people and works supported by the Wolf Aviation Fund.

THE OTHER WING

by

Darryl Phillips

FLYING ADVENTURES WERE A WAY OF LIFE FOR CONNIE AND ABBY WOLF - May 1994

Constance Wolf is dead. The obituary is official, she passed away near Philadelphia on April 14 of this year. She was a pilot for two-thirds of her 89 years.

Some may believe she is gone, but I know better. Connie isn't dead. As long as a single spark of flying adventure remains, Connie will be alive in the truest meaning of the word.

I never knew her. And yet I did. We all did, and we all do. Her spirit is the spirit that makes flying worth doing.

In 1962, Connie was the first woman to cross the Alps in a balloon.

Connie abhorred hot air ballooning. Too hot, much too noisy, not what a person of character would fly. Her balloons were filled with hydrogen. Not helium, Connie would have only the best, and that was hydrogen. She suspended a fluffy feather from a wisp of thread to see if she was climbing or descending.

Ballooning or not, she always wore a thin mesh-like veil over her face. She said "it holds my head on". Character. That's what she was, and that's what she had. In her own words, a "balloonatic".

Connie had one balloon named La Coquette. Her friend Mike Todd used it to film AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS. This balloon was seven stories high, and in 1956 she flew it over London and Paris to promote the movie.

One of her many close calls came in 1954 when she was aloft with four others, including the son of Jeannette Piccard, the balloonist who had set the altitude record of 57,579 feet twenty years earlier. The gas suddenly escaped and they lost 4200 feet in less than two minutes. When they hit the ground one passenger broke a toe, another her foot. But Connie was only bruised. The deflated bag had acted as a parachute.

In 1959, Connie duplicated the first balloon flight in America, exactly repeating what Jean Pierre Blanchard had done in 1793. Earlier, in 1951, she spent a frigid 40 hours and 18 minutes setting 15 world records, including taking the women's endurance record away from two Russians. "Just to prove that one capitalist can take on two Communists any day!"

And on the 200th anniversary of the Constitution she flew a balloon shaped like the Liberty Bell over Philadelphia.

Once, in the Netherlands, she wanted to participate in a race but she hadn't brought a balloon. So she borrowed a surplus Navy one that she described as "mostly mildew and patches".

When Connie wasn't ballooning, she was flying with her husband Abby, or she was mowing their 3000 foot landing strip Wingover. Even at age 80, long after Wingover had ceased to be active, she still climbed on the old red tractor and kept the strip mowed and manicured. As she had for half a century.

In the earlier days, parties were a staple at Wingover. Come one, come all. But you had to come by air. Sometimes 150 planes arrived. Connie loved parties. Common folks, and the rich and famous. Howard Hughes, Elizabeth Taylor, Ginger Rogers, the list goes on and on. Once, at his birthday party, her husband opened his eyes to see the girl wrapped in ribbons pop out of the box. The girl was Marlene Dietrich. Such was life at Wingover.

She had married Alfred L. (Abby) Wolf in 1931, two years after he had become a pilot. She learned to fly on their honeymoon. Abby liked airplanes with engines so you could GO somewhere. Connie preferred silent balloons, so you could BE somewhere.

In 1938, along with Laurence and Philip Sharples, J. Story Smith, and Charles Townsend Ludington, Abby Wolf founded the Aircraft Owner and Pilots Association. Abby held card #5 and was active on the AOPA board and served as general counsel until his death in 1985. He often went out of his way to support aviation for the common man. He opposed every regulation that would have increased the cost of flying. Abby continued to fly his C-170 anywhere and everywhere, he was current to the day he died at age 80.

The Alfred L. and Constance Wolf Aviation Fund was established in 1986 "to support scientific research and educational programs in matters relating to the use of aircraft as a means of transportation". To promote ideas that make general aviation safer, less expensive, more fun and more useful, the Wolf Fund awards a \$10,000 annual prize. Each year the subject varies, in 1993 Dr. Philip J. Kellman received the honor for his concept of Visual Learning Modules as a new tool for training specific flying skills.

This year the subject was engines and airframes. Regular readers of this column who have followed my obsession with Stirling engines will understand why I perked up when that topic was announced.

On the way to Sun 'n Fun this spring, four of us were having lunch at a barbecue joint near Mobile Alabama. We were driving, one of the disadvantages of exhibiting at events like Oshkosh and Sun 'n Fun is that we carry so much product we cannot fly. This year we had the pleasure of convoying with Bill Bainbridge and Bob Nuckolls. Bill is the "B" in B & C Specialty Products, Bob publishes the Aeroelectric Connection. We were chowing down and plotting our chances of making the Space Shuttle launch scheduled for the next morning. Wife Patsy went to pick up our calls and came back with just one message.

"You had better look at this" she said to me. The way she said it sounded ominous indeed.

There were just four words. "Wolf Fund. You Won!"

A week later, Connie Wolf died. It happened on the same day and at almost the same hour that I presented a forum on Stirling powered aircraft.

Connie, I want you to know that you were right, hydrogen is best. Having the lowest molecular weight, it is the best gas to use in Stirling engines, just as it was best in your beloved balloons. And your feelings about the majesty of silent flight were on target, too. Aviation inflicts too much noise on society, we need to be seen, not heard.

And Abby, you were right too. Airplanes are for going somewhere. The Stirling puts out more power as the plane climbs into colder air, and together with the reduced drag at altitude will permit cruise speeds of twice what we're doing now. On a fuel that is safer, more affordable, and more efficient.

Thank you for the honor. And thank you for the prize money, which will be used in further development of the Stirling aircraft powerplant.

There is a wide gulf between the Wolfs of Wingover, partying with Elizabeth Taylor or Howard Hughes, and myself. Different time, different place. Different financial circumstances. And yet we aren't different, are we? The joy of slipping the surly bonds transcends all those superficial differences. We are the same.

Additional photos and information can be found on the Balloon Federation of America's National Balloon Museum Website: <http://www.nationalballoonmuseum.com/HallofFame>