

THE RITE FLYER

MARTIN AIRFIELD

GAX: In search of a mission after World War I

BY **FREDERICK JOHNSEN** (REPRINTED FROM GENERAL AVIATION NEWS)

Coming Up ...

Meeting :

Monday , September 13th,
7:00 p.m. In-person and
Online

Program: TBD

Board of Directors

September 11th, 5:00 pm

Next Meeting:

October 11th, Martin Field,
7:00 P.M.

Chapter Website:

chapters.eaa.org/ea604

2021 Officers

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The Army Air Service was populated with proactive pilots and planners who gained firsthand combat experience in World War I. To their chagrin, the years immediately following the war were characterized by a slumbering lack of national initiative on an air policy, as explained by then-Lt. Clayton Bissell.

Bissell and his compatriot Billy Mitchell looked at bombardment and its adjunct, ground attack aviation, as fertile fields for sowing a core mission for the Air Service.

In 1919, the Air Service solicited proposals from the aviation industry for a ground attack aircraft, specializing in heavy firepower and protected by armor plating in an effort to ensure its survival in low-altitude battlefield warfare.

The Army designed a twin-engine pusher triplane to meet the need, and built the prototype as the GAX or Ground Attack Experimental.

The machine won no beauty contests, with its truncated nose and oversized rudder. Nor did it win friends in the flying community, as the weight of the armor and armament taxed the ability of two Liberty engines to propel it.



WE'VE ONLY FOUND ONE PHOTO OF THE GA-X OR A GA-1 IN FLIGHT. THIS IMAGE SHOWS THE CUMBERSOME AIRCRAFT OVER MCCOOK FIELD IN OHIO. (NATIONAL ARCHIVES VIA WALTER J. BOYNE COLLECTION)

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Calendar Items to share

Week Days Coffee Club, Martin Field Pilot's Lounge, **The Pilot's lounge is approved for meetings**

Sep 25 Last Saturday Breakfast with EAA Chapter 1639, Hermiston Ore. 7:30-11:00

Sep 20-Oct 2 Snake River STOL Drag Race, Ontario Oregon



GAX: In Search of a Mission *continued*

The immediate postwar period was a time when aircraft manufacturers scrambled for work, and the small but growing Boeing company won the bid to build 20 GAX aircraft under the designation GA-1. The order was quickly reduced to 10 of the unwieldy and ungainly aircraft.

The twin pusher Liberty engines were mounted in armored nacelles on the middle of the three wings, with a gunner's emplacement in the front of each nacelle contributing to forward ground attack firepower. The gunners and the pilot all had armor protection with slits or shutters providing the needed visibility to do their tasks.

The GA-1 production variant was capable of carrying eight .30-caliber machine guns and one 37-mm cannon.



THE FRONT OF EACH ENGINE NACELLE WAS AN ARMORED GUNNER'S POSITION FOR THE INTENDED MISSION OF GROUND ATTACK. (NATIONAL ARCHIVES VIA WALTER J. BOYNE COLLECTION).

Aerodynamics left a lot to be desired and the pusher Liberty engines suffered from cooling issues. All 10 were delivered to Kelly Field in Texas, where they survived until 1926 before scrapping.

Still enamored with the idea of an armored ground attack airplane, the Air Service developed the GA-2, a single-engine biplane. Boeing delivered two of this model to McCook Field in Ohio, for testing beginning in December 1921. The engine specified for the GA-2 was an untried Army design producing between 700 and 750 horsepower.

The GA-1 had a gross weight of more than five tons; the GA-2 topped out at a bit over four and a quarter tons. The big GA-1 had a service ceiling of 9,600 feet — not an issue as long as its intended combat operations did not approach battlefields at high mountain elevations. The smaller GA-2 had a service ceiling of 12,000 feet.

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Nomination of Officers

It is time to elect new leadership for the Chapter. President Bill is appointing a nomination committee to present a slate of officers for the next two years. We will be looking for people willing to serve as an officer. Bill Herrington has served as President for 2 terms and is not looking for a third term. So please consider accepting a leadership position.

Our By-Laws include the officers on the Board of Directors. We are also looking for a couple of members to serve on the Board. Currently the Board meets a few days before our general meeting and handles most of the business of Chapter. Any action needing Chapter approval will be brought before the membership for approval.

Elections will be held at our December meeting whether we have a Holiday Dinner or a regular meeting. Please consider serving in a leadership position. If we all share the responsibility it does not become a burden for anyone.

Newsletters now available online!

Check out our web site at chapters.eaa.org/eaab04

I have uploaded the newsletters from the past 2 years onto the site so if you want to look back for an article, you can do it by clicking the "Newsletters" tab on the left and then selecting your month. Any months which are lettered in black do not have a newsletter associated with the link. Just go for the blue writing. You can visit this page as often as you like. I will be adding newsletters as they are available.

EAA 604 Minutes, August 9, 2021

The General Membership meeting was called to order by President Bill Herrington at 7:08 p.m. after some technical adjustments. There were no guests present. We had 15 members in attendance in-person and 4 attending via Zoom. The minutes were emailed before the meeting and presented for approval. A motion was made and seconded that we approve the minutes. The motion carried.

Board Report: The Board discussed the following items at its August meeting. 1. Young Eagle make-up flights. Don Gibbard did 5 flights in August. Susan C. is hoping to get others scheduled and completed before the end of August. She suggested we invite YE candidates to view the B-17 and maybe work in their first flight. 2. C.A.P. has 12 Cadets who are interested in YE flights. Bill is working to set this up. Discussion followed: It will be an EAA Chapter Event which requires a certificate of Insurance from EAA. We have a large span of time to work out the details. 3. The B-17 Flying Legends will be in Walla Walla Monday Aug. 16th at 11 a.m. We will use some of our equipment for the event. 4. We are supporting the Pendleton Chapter next weekend for their YE event. Starting at 8 a.m., ground support should be there at 7:00 a.m. Bring vests and stanchions.

Old Business: Projects— Boyd is installing the wind-screen and has been working everyday to complete the project. Charlie has been taking a lot of vacation and has not made much progress!! Jim Edwards has no air conditioner in his shop so he has limited time. He has designed tail wheel doors and installed them. Working on upholstery. Matt is working on his RV-9 and he has given himself a deadline of September to have the Legal Eagle finished.

Nothing to report on the Airports at this time.

We have tentatively set October 2 for our Movie Night and we will be holding it at Gorge Aviation this year.

Flying Club: The Tecnam is getting a new engine and they have several new students in the Club.

We followed our meeting with refreshments and a short video on STOL Drag Racing.

Respectfully submitted,
Don Gibbard, Secretary

Movie Night—October 2, 7:00 pm

We are bringing back the Movie Night this year with a new twist. This October 2nd EAA 604 will host our movie night at the hangar of Gorge Aviation at the Walla Walla Regional Airport. The feature will be Memphis Belle highlighting the B-17 and the Walla Walla connection with one of the main characters in the film. We will have popcorn and other refreshments to enhance your viewing pleasure. With new projection and audio equipment this will be an experience you won't want to miss.

Chapter Meetings

Our September Chapter meeting will be held at the Pilot's lounge at Martin Field this Monday night. We are back to meeting in person and we hope that as many of you who can will join us at 7:00 p.m. If you are unable to attend in-person or feel like waiting until our covid count goes back down, we will host the online Zoom meeting on Monday September 13th starting at 7:00 p.m. You will receive an invitation to join the meeting from Ron Urban. There will be a link to the online meeting you can use with a computer, smartphone, tablet with video capabilities. If you do not have a camera on your computer you can still join online but you will need a microphone in order to join the conversation. We are trying a new conference speaker at this meeting so we should have better audio for ZOOM.

Keep your email invitation handy as you login since it contains all the information you need to succeed.

We are looking for volunteers to bring refreshments for the remainder of the year. Please let Bill H or Don G know if you can provide refreshments at our meetings.

2021 REFRESHMENTS

JULY	Stock Supplies
AUGUST	Don Gibbard
SEPTEMBER	Travis & Susan
OCTOBER	
NOVEMBER	
DECEMBER	CHRISTMAS PARTY

FAA Releases Data Showing Trends in Dangerous Laser Strikes



WASHINGTON – Shining a laser at an aircraft poses a serious safety threat and can result in large fines and criminal penalties. Working to identify trends in laser strikes, [the U.S. Transportation Department's](#) Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has developed a visualization tool that analyzes laser strike data from 2010 to 2020.

Using the [Tableau](#) software platform, the tool identifies trends that include geographic area, per capita data, time of day and year. The FAA is sharing the information in the new format to draw attention to the dangerously high rate of laser strikes on airplanes.

“Pointing a laser at an aircraft can temporarily blind a pilot and not only affects the crew but endangers passengers and the communities they fly over every night,” said [FAA Administrator Steve Dickson](#).

Laser strikes increased in 2020 despite the decrease in flights due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pilots reported 6,852 laser strikes to the FAA last year, up from 6,136 in 2019. The number of incidents reported in 2020 incidents was the highest annual total since 2016. [Laser report data by year](#) is available for download on the FAA website.

People who shine lasers at aircraft face FAA fines of up to \$11,000 per violation and up to \$30,800 for multiple laser incidents. The FAA has issued \$600,000 in fines since 2016, which includes \$120,000 in 2021. Violators can also face criminal penalties from federal, state and local law enforcement agencies.

The FAA remains vigilant in raising awareness about the dangers of pointing lasers at aircraft and encourages the public to [report laser strikes](#) to the FAA and local law enforcement.

GAX: continued



BOEING GA-2 GROUND ATTACK AIRCRAFT OF 1921 PLACED GUNS BETWEEN THE LANDING GEAR, FIRING FORWARD AND DOWN. (WALTER J. BOYNE COLLECTION)

The Air Service, later Air Corps and Army Air Forces, had an evolving relationship with ground attack aviation up through World War II. While some Second World War bombers like the B-25 and A-26 employed bolt-on armor plating to protect the crew, this latter day shielding was less penalizing in aircraft performance than the sheathing on the GA-1 and GA-2. Speed and surprise favored ground attack in World War II.

The GAX was designed by the Air Service's Isaac Laddon. If the GAX was not a career high point, Laddon went on to become a designer at Consolidated Aircraft where he is generally credited with successes like the B-24 Liberator, produced in larger numbers than any other American bomber of World War II.

And Lieutenant Clayton Bissell retired from the Air Force as a major general in 1950, after a career that included espousing the value of bombardment aviation and occasionally running afoul of fighter advocate Claire Chennault of Flying Tigers fame during World War II.

Frederick Johnsen

Fred Johnsen is a product of the historical aviation scene in the Pacific Northwest. The author of numerous historical aviation books and articles, Fred was an Air Force historian and curator.