

Aviation Pioneer Urges Emphasis In Use of Space

By CARLTON WILSON

United Press International
Albuquerque, N.M. — (UPI)—The man who invented the airplane seat belt had an experience comparable to Sir Isaac Newton, who discovered the law of gravity when an apple fell on him as he sat under a tree.

Maj. Gen. Benjamin Foulois (ret.) was pilot of the only military plane in the nation nearly 50 years ago when Foulois almost fell out of the cockpit. He was saved only because his head hit the upper wing causing him to bounce back in the seat.

Foulois, now 83 and a walking history book of aviation, says the harrowing experience helped lead him to invent the seat belt that has since saved countless lives in automobiles as well as airplanes.

The spy aviation pioneer recently visited the air force special weapons center at Kirtland Air Force base in Albuquerque. Foulois found the scientific complex in stark contrast to the city's old airport 35 years ago when he flew into it in a spindly single-seater.

Spends Money

In those days of pioneer aviators Foulois once spent \$300 from his own pocket to keep America's one and only military airplane flying.

He was taught to fly by Wilbur Wright in 1909, in 84 minutes of personal instruction. Then Foulois, who pronounces his name Fuh-loi, was put in charge of a Kitty Hawk-type aircraft based at San Antonio, Tex. It was the first military plane in the nation. Foulois soon spent his \$150 budget and had to finance operations out of his own pay and from donations.

The Wright brothers continued to advise the nation's first army pilot by mail, probably making Foulois the first correspondence school flyer in the world.

Now an alert gray-haired man whose only concession to advanced age is a transistor hearing aid in his left ear, Foulois recalled his first military flight from Fort Sam Houston:

"I soloed, made my first take off, my first landing, and first crack-up all in the same day," Foulois said.

Attains Speed

His biplane attained a top speed of 45 miles per hour powered by its 25 horsepower engine.

On one of his flights, Foulois discovered he was drifting over San Antonio which was north of the airfield. But his nose was pointed south. "A high wind and you flew backwards in those days," he laughed.

In 1916 the general led the country's first air squadron on a reconnaissance mission with Gen. John Pershing in Mexico against bandit Pancho Villa. Of eight planes in the group only two came back, and those two had to be declared unusable, Foulois said.

Pershing said after the campaign that one airplane was worth a regiment of cavalry.

Develops Bombers
Other "firsts" for Foulois include the operation of a radio installed in an airplane, and transmission of the first telegram from a plane. He won the rank of brigadier general in World War I at the age of 38. He headed the Army Air Corps from 1930 to 1935, doing much to develop the B17 and B24 bombers later used in World War II.

Foulois retired in 1935 and "spent the next 24 years in civil confinement." He has not piloted a plane since then, but has flown as a passenger more than 300,000 miles making speeches for the Air Force since he accepted an advisory post in 1959.

His message to service clubs and civic groups throughout the nation is a terse one:

"People have tended to become complacent and downgrade the needs of the military in the space age. We've got the brainpower, but we've got to spend the money."

Foulois warns that unless enough emphasis is put on the military uses of space, that "when we start flying around in space we'll find a hammer and sickle on it."

"They're going to say, 'boys, we're running the show up here. You get on back down there!'" Foulois said.

BULLET BURGLAR

Berkeley, Calif. — (UPI)—A San Francisco Bay area thief apparently planned to throw a lot of lead. A truck driver reported to police that 1,000 rounds of .38 special caliber bullets were stolen from his truck while he was eating lunch.



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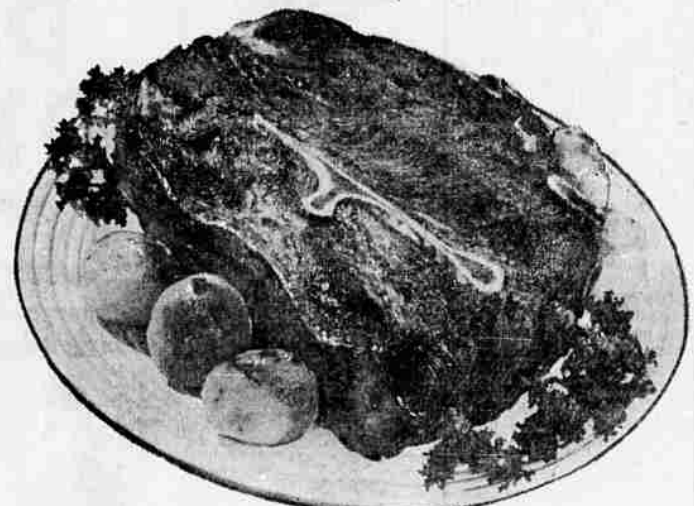
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