

James Hamilton Keeton and His Planes



By Leslie M. Joyner

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James Hamilton Keeton

In Meridian, Mississippi Mr. and Mrs. Monroe Keeton had a baby boy on August 19, 1910 who would grow into an innovative young man. His name was James Hamilton Keeton. James attended Meridian Public Schools and graduated from Meridian High School in 1928 followed by his sister Cornelia's graduation in 1929.

One day, while still a young man, James went for a joy ride with Al Key and his love of flying began. James often showed exotic chickens in county fairs and did odd jobs and saved everything he earned. He attended and graduated from OMI School in Cincinnati, Ohio. (This was probably the Ohio Mechanical Institute, that was taken over by University of Cincinnati in 1969.)



The Key Brothers

On September 5, 1932 James finally saved enough to begin taking flying lessons from the Key Brothers at the Meridian Municipal Airport. Before making his first solo flight in an OXX6 Eagle Rock plane, James had received 3 hours 30 minutes of instruction from Al Key. Mr. Key commented that young James was "cool headed and calm of nerve" for his first solo flight. James went on to complete another 8 hours of solo flight and instruction from Al Key's brother Fred. James was now ready to apply for his pilots license!



Eagle Rock Bi-Plane

After totaling 9 hours and 30 minutes dual instruction with another student, Mayor Vinson's son Gene, and an additional 13 hours and 40 minutes of solo flying time, James took the test given by I.K. McWilliams of the Aeronautics Branch of the Department of Commerce. Mr. McWilliams stated that James "Showed better judgment and stood the test better than any he had given the test to in months." Al Key commented that the test that day, January 17, 1933 was very difficult as the winds were moving at 40 mph at 100 feet and up.



Curtiss Robin Single Engine

With his pilot's license in hand, James sold and hocked everything he had in order to buy a used Curtiss Robin single engine plane. He soon obtained a contract with the city of Mobile, Alabama to operate out of Bates Field, which later became the location for Brookley Air Force Base. He and his friend Jimmie Parker started their business there, Keeton-Parker Flying Services. They eventually had 3-4 planes

and offered charters, joy rides, aerial photography, and flying lessons. Some of their students included people from Meridian; James sister Cornelia, Mrs. Clenita Broach Stover, Dr. Andy Henderson, and Dr. Ernest Hodges to name a few specific students. They were also recommended by Naval Officers across the nation as the best preliminary school for potential military pilots.



Bates Field in Mobile, Alabama



**Bates Field was changed to
Brookley Air Force Base in 1939**

On the weekends they could often be found at county fairs or even at farmers fields out in the far reaches of the state barnstorming and performing Stunt shows. Barnstorming was a popular form of entertainment beginning in the 1920's and for many pilots was the only income during the Great Depression of the 1930's. This was the first major form of civilian aviation. The "barnstormers" would operate from farmers fields selling rides and offering a show of aeronautic feats that awed the crowds. Often times, the money received was from the "hat" being passed around and people placed in whatever they could afford. The Barnstorming season ran from early spring until after the harvest in the fall.



Barnstorming Show

In 1934 the Key Brothers, James' flying instructors, decided to bring more attention to Meridian Municipal Airport and Aviation by breaking the World Endurance record for flying non-stop which at that time was held by the Hunter Brothers of Chicago at 647.5 hours. At this time the Depression was hitting the area hard and the City of Meridian was looking at the Airport to create more farm areas for the cotton farmers. If this happened the flying dreams of the Key Brothers would die. Breaking the Endurance Record would surely prevent the airport from being turned over to the farmers.



Hunter Brothers: L-R: Walter, John, Kenneth, Albert



Meridian Municipal Airport before the Air National Guard building, at this time the runways were still dirt.

The Keys procured a Curtiss Robin from Bill Ward. This would become the original "Ole Miss." With the help of Dave Stephenson a cat walk was constructed allowing them to perform in-flight maintenance such as oiling and lubricating the plane's engine. Now they needed a similar plane that would be able to match altitude and speed in order to bring them gasoline and supplies. In that search was their former student, James Hamilton Keeton, now owner and operator of Keeton-

Parker Flying Services in Mobile, Alabama. James offered his plane and his services as pilot. In the beginning, the brothers wanted a more experienced pilot, but James was adamant It was his plane and if it was to be used, he would be the pilot. Al and Fred relented and the planning began. Sponsors of this first attempt included the Lt. T.C. Carter, Jr. American Legion post No. 21 and the Junior Chamber of Commerce.

The original plans were to refuel twice a day. “A 40 foot hose will be dropped from the refueling ship, which will fly directly above the ‘Ole Miss’... James Keeton, will endeavor to keep an even course guiding the ship by the horizon before him, while the pilot of the ‘Ole Miss’ will steer his ship while looking directly over his head while the co-pilot reaches for the hose...” Refueling at this point in time was extremely dangerous, so each pilot and co-pilot wore parachutes just in case things went terribly wrong.



James ‘Jim’ Keeton and William ‘Bill’ Ward dressed in their parachutes

Very little was known about other pilots’ attempts, as they guarded their planes and secrets closely. So it was up to the Keys, Keeton, Ward, and other members of the team to determine what could best be used and how to go about creating what had never been made before.



The 'Ole Miss' In Flight



The 'Ole Miss' now hangs in the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum

The first attempt was on June 21, 1934, but a loosened cylinder in the planes engine forced them to land 123 hours later. A month later they had the plane repaired and began again. Terrible thunder storms seemed to be the lot for the weather for July and after 169 hours of flying, the Key Brothers again landed having failed in their attempt to break the World Endurance Record. What they needed for situations such as bad weather was "Blind Flying Instruments." The kind used by the Military Pilots as well as proper radio communications that would allow them to talk the ground crew at Meridian Municipal Airport.

The job of the radio fell to local amateur radio man Ben Woodruff. He was able to use the VHF band of radio signals to make a 2 way transmitting radio, thus allowing communications with the Key



Claire Chennault in later years

Brothers. If they needed parts they could call them in and have them sent up on the next contact, or if bad weather was moving in. Cornelia Keeton, who operated the radio, or one of the other operators could contact the Brothers to let them know what areas to avoid. Captain Claire Chennault of the US Army Air Corps loaned the "Blind Flying Instruments" to the Keys and Keeton. This was the first time that these instruments were used on privately owned planes. Captain Chennault would later

become Major and command the “Flying Tigers” during World War II.



Curtiss P-40 fighter aircraft of the Flying Tigers, with their iconic shark face and the 12-point sun of the Chinese Air Force.

Another problem that they had was the refueling. The 40 foot hose that Bill Ward lowered to the “Ole Miss” was hard to get to the plane due to the high winds. Weights were added that helped Ward direct the hose to the plane. Also, in order for the fuel to begin flowing from James’s plane down to the “Ole Miss,” Ward would have to turn a standard water faucet several times. James solved this dilemma by taking a blow-out valve from his family’s dry cleaning business and installing it into the base of the hose. This allowed Ward to make one 90 degree turn which started fuel down to the “Ole Miss.” Often during the refueling procedure the planes would separate causing the hose to become dislodged and spraying the Keys and the plane. Fortunately, gasoline never reached the engine.



In-flight refueling, allows planes to go further



A.D Hunter in later years

A.D. Hunter a member of the ground crew and a machinist at Soule Steam Feed Works of Meridian, tackled this problem. Mr. Hunter was often thought of as a mechanical genius. His solution was an automatic shut off valve which he built and installed on the receiving end of the hose. If the hose lost contact with the tank, then it automatically would shut the flow of fuel off. This eliminated overflow and spillage of fuel.



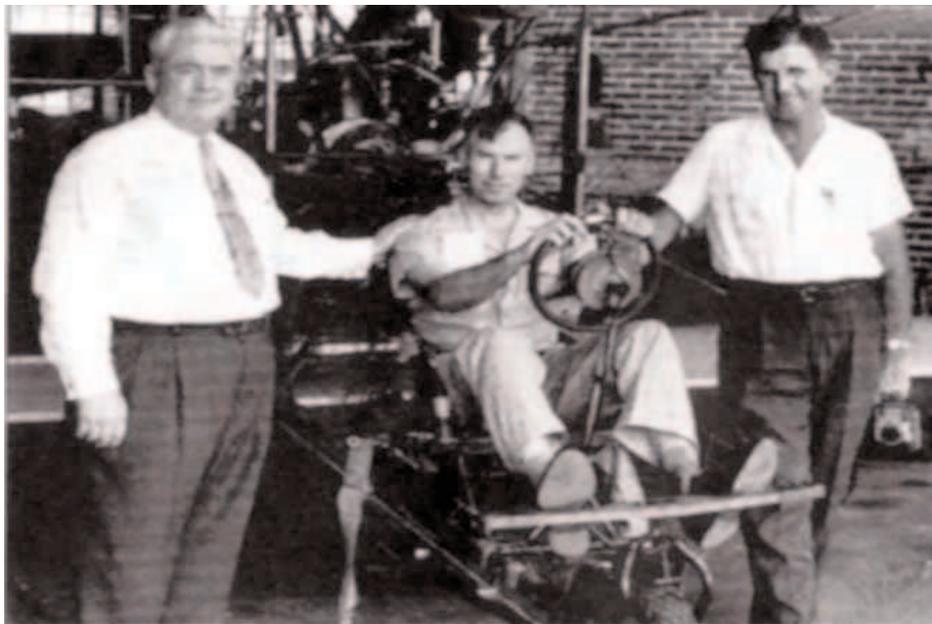
Al and Fred Key, James Keeton, and Bill Ward standing in front of the 'Ole Miss'



Endurance Flight and Ground Crew



Endurance Flight and Ground Crew



**1955: L-R: Ben H. Woodraft (Woodruff), James H. Keeton,
and William Ward**



James Keeton and Al Key



Key Brothers at the Golden Anniversary Celebration of their Endurance Flight (1955)

Their modified shut-off valve was adopted by United States Air Force and a similar design and technique of in-flight refueling is still used by the Strategic Air Command. In later years, General T.R. Milton, USAF Retired, stated that “Air refueling, perhaps the single most important development in the employment of land based air forces, performs the same basic tasks as the carrier. It increased the striking radius of the airplane.” Thanks to the innovations of these young men, Meridian is the home of the 186th Air Refueling Wing.



General T. R. Milton



Insignia of the 186th Air Refueling Wing located in Meridian, MS



Entrance to 186th Air Refueling Wing



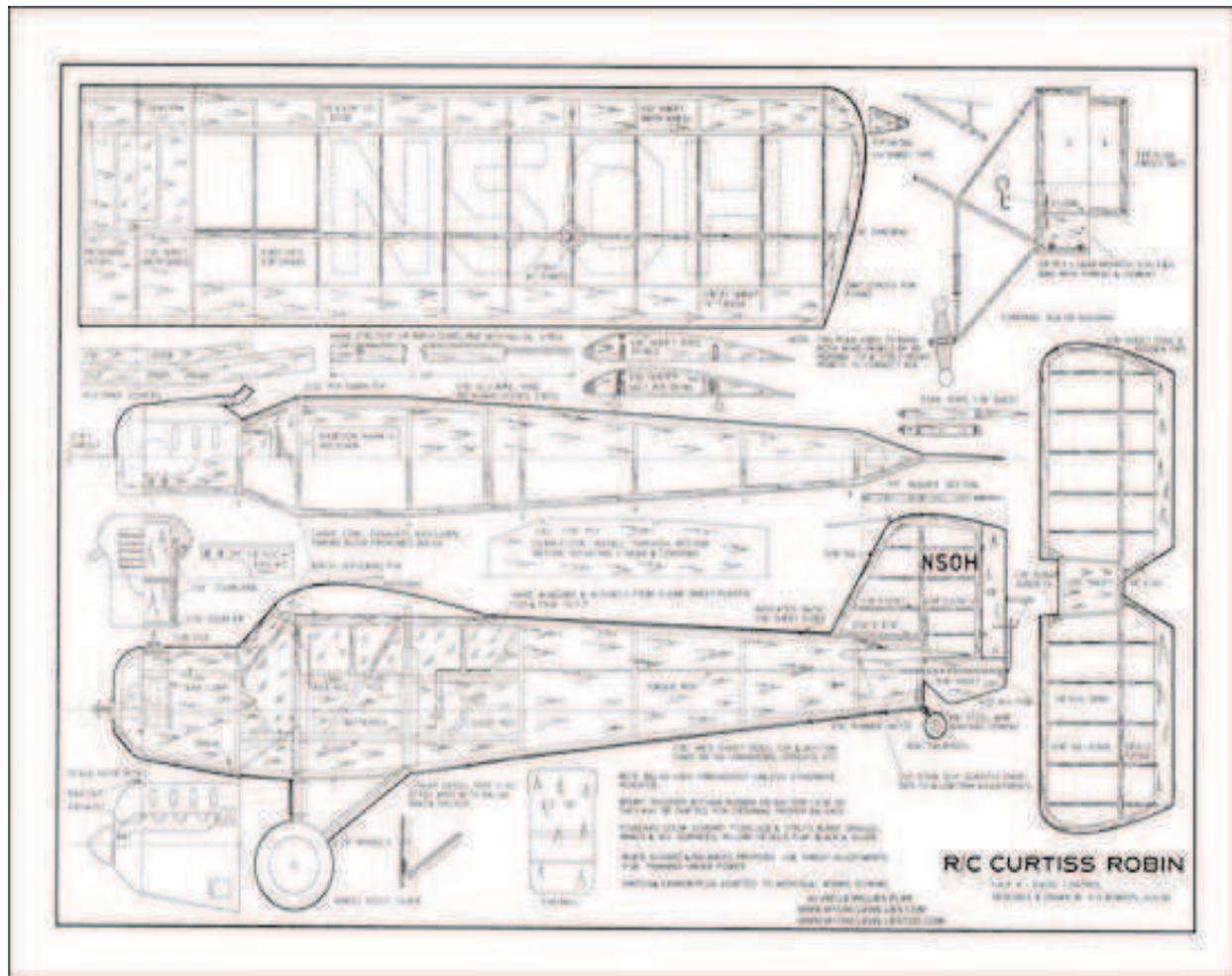
Modern In-Flight Fueling by USAF



Modern Refuel Tanker Cockpit



C-130E Refuel Tanker



Building Prints for a Curtiss Robin Single Engine Plane

After nearly a year of modifications and planning the team was ready to try again. The log book from James's Curtiss Robin indicated that from June 12 -20 they made 5 experimental runs for the new refueling system. During this time they also created an itinerary for the days of flying. Everyone involved slept in the hangar in case there were problems. If a night time landing had to be made the radio operator had a list of numbers of locales to call to bring their automobiles to the air field, because at this time there were no lights there. The cars would then be placed along the landing strip lighting the way for the Key Brothers.

1935		MONTH OF June											
DATE	Type Plane	Licence No.	Type Engine	FROM	TO	WEATHER	REMARKS	FLIGHT HRS.	ALTITUDE	TIME	TEMP.	WIND	OTHER
6/1/35	Curtiss Robin	NC60V	Wright T-6-S	Meridian	New Orleans	Squalls	Inspection	1	Pass	1	45	205	
6/1/35	"	NR60V	"	New Orleans	Meridian	Fair	"	1	"	1	45	145	
6/4/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	1750V5	17	"	17	"	215	
6/5/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	4	"	12	"	140	
6/6/35	"	"	"	"	"	Thunder	"	4	"	13	"	145	
6/7/35	"	"	"	"	"	Fair	"	4	"	12	"	200	
6/8/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	5	"	14	"	220	
6/9/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	4	"	15	"	145	
6/10/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	5	"	17	"	220	
6/11/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	4	"	16	"	155	
6/12/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	4	"	16	"	150	
6/13/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	4	"	16	"	155	
6/14/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	4	"	18	"	150	
6/15/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	5	"	18	"	225	
6/16/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	5	"	18	"	225	
6/17/35	Franklin	NC95TV	Wacoer P-5	"	"	Fair	Revenue Day	1	Pass	1	"	10	
6/18/35	Curtiss Robin	NR60V	Wright T-6-S	"	"	Squally	1852GNH Flights	16	Corals	16	"	145	
6/19/35	"	"	"	"	"	Fair	"	4	"	16	"	200	
6/20/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	4	"	16	"	135	
6/21/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	5	"	18	"	220	
6/22/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	4	"	16	"	140	
6/23/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	4	"	18	"	135	
6/24/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	4	"	16	"	140	
6/25/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	4	"	18	"	120	
6/25/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	4	"	16	"	120	
6/25/35	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	1	"	0	"	25	

A few pages from James H. Keetons Log book during the Endurance flight for his Curtiss Robin

1935 MONTH OF June - July - August				SUMATOR	
DATE	Type Plane	License No.	Type Engine	FROM	TO
6/26/35	Curtiss-Robin	NR609V	Wright 76-5	Meridian	Meridian
6/27/35	"	"	"	"	"
6/28/35	"	"	"	"	"
6/29/35	"	"	"	"	"
6/30/35	"	"	"	"	"
"	Fairchild 22	"	Cessna	"	"
7/1/35	Curtiss-Robin	NR609V	Wright 76-5	Meridian	New Orleans
7/3/35	"	NC609V	"	New Orleans	Jackson
7/4/35	"	"	"	"	"
7/5/35	"	"	"	Jackson	Meridian
7/25/35	"	"	"	"	"
7/26/35	"	"	"	Meridian	Mobile
7/27/35	"	"	"	"	"
7/28/35	"	"	"	"	"
8/3/35	"	"	"	"	"
8/4/35	"	"	"	"	"
8/5/35	Fairchild 24	NC	Warner 145	Mobile	Gulfport
"	Curtiss-Robin	NC609V	Wright 76-5	"	"
"	Fairchild 24	NC	Warner 145	"	"
8/6/35	"	NC	"	"	"
8/7/35	Curtiss-Robin	NC609V	Wright 76-5	"	"
"	"	"	"	"	"

WEATHER	REMARKS	SUMATOR
Squalls	Refueling NR526 N 4 Flights 1600	25
"	" " " " 18 "	140
"	" " " " 16 "	140
"	" " " " 15 "	145
"	" " " " 17 "	125
Fair	Stunting	12
"	Refueling " " 12 "	100
"	Cross-C Inspection O pass	145
Bad Squalls	" " Boasting C "	200
Fair	Airport Revenue 34 "	145
"	Restricted Refueling Demonstration / pass	25
"	Cross-C Boasting O pass	180
"	Airport Revenue 18 pass	45
"	" " " 6 "	20
Squalls	Cross-C Return Home 0 "	170
Fair	Airport Revenue 6 " / night	20
"	" " " 2 " Day	10
"	" " " 2 " Night	10
"	" " " 56 - / Night	230
"	Refueling Demonstration 1 "	15
"	Airport Check 1 "	20
"	Cross-C Protective Correction 1 "	40
Squalls	Airport " " 8 "	40
"	" " " 25 "	120
Windy	" Ship Island & Ret. 2 "	25
Squalls	" Protective Correction 25 "	145

CERTIFIED CORRECT

JAMES N. KEETER

PAGE TOTAL 57 15
 BROUGHT FORWARD 552 17
 TOTAL HOURS TO DATE 579 37



At 4:30 a.m. when the spotter would change shifts, Ward and Keeton were awakened. By 5:00 a.m. they took to the air to deliver the mornings fuel, along with drinks, shaving supplies, tools, parts, newspapers and notes. At 6:45 a.m. a second contact would be made delivering more fuel along with a breakfast and lunch combination. A third contact would be made in the afternoon bringing them supper & more gas. A fourth and final contact for the day would be made delivering gas and anything else the brothers needed.

The major task for James was finding the brothers. "This may have seemed simple to anybody on the ground, but there is a lot of space up there, and that plane off in the distance was awfully small." During the refueling, James would fly within 8-10 feet of the "Ole Miss." He said, "I couldn't even see the 'Ole Miss' while she was drinking fuel. All I got was a play by play commentary from Bill Ward as he lowered and raised the hose." This took about 5-6 minutes to transfer 60 gallons of fuel. The supplies were lowered in much the same fashion, via a rope from Keeton's plane down to the Key Brothers.

On June 29 a fire on the instrument panel from a short circuit erupted. Al calmly put out the fire with an extinguisher. At the time James was flying near them getting photographs, "It scared me more than it did Al and Fred."



Making Engine Repairs in-flight

Not much fanfare had been made of this third attempt but when they passed the halfway mark, on June 27th, of breaking the Hunter Brothers record things changed. Reporters from all across the nation began flocking to Meridian and sending their stories to their home papers. Reports of the flight were even being sent by wire to England. The Meridian City Council then renamed Meridian Municipal Airport to Key Field in honor of the Key Brothers.



Key Field in 1941

In the first hours of the month of July, after 27 days 5 hours and 34 minutes of flying they landed safely and thus broke the Hunter's record. They totaled 52,320 miles in flight, used 65,000 gallons of fuel and 300 gallons of oil. Making a total of 438 successful contacts with the "Ole Miss" in-flight to deliver fuel and supplies. Later in July, James, Bill Ward, and the Keys began giving exhibitions at low altitude of their refueling techniques for the public. One such Exhibition was held in Mobile, at Bates Field, where James's business was stationed, as well as in Biloxi, MS.



THOMAS J. HAMMER
DIRECTOR AGENCY SERVICE

July 15, 1935

Mr. Monroe Keeton,
Meridian, Mississippi.

Dear Mr. Keeton:

As you know, we are going to have our convention at Biloxi on August 5, 6, and 7. Mr. Clabaugh asked me to write and see if you and James and the plane couldn't arrange to be with us on those days. We would certainly be delighted to have you and we hope you can arrange to come.

Yours very sincerely,

Thomas J. Hammer
Director Agency Service

This was the first time any insurance company admitted that there was such a thing as aviation. I went, flew delegates at the convention on right-seating sides in my Robin from the golf course of the "Edgewater Gulf" hotel, at Protective's expense, then flew Mr. Clabaugh, Protective's president to Houston and back. I consider this a milestone in making it possible to have aviation risks insured.

M. Keeton



Eda Soule Keeton

James returned to his business in Mobile. A few months later with the help of Major Chennault, James earned a commission in the US ARMY AIR CORPS RESERVES. He served for 10 years as a pilot in the Reserves. While in Officers training in Atlanta at Fort McPherson he married Eda Soule. Eda's mother, Constance was from Nassau, New York, and her father was G.W. Soule founder of Soule Steam Feed Works in Meridian. She spent most of her childhood in Meridian, and that is probably where she and James first met. Eda had two brothers, Halbert, who gave away the bride, and Clyde. She also had a sister, Mrs. Eugene Billington. Eda attended

Rollings (Rollins) College in Winter Park, Florida. She was also enrolled in Aviation and Photography at Camp Roosevelt in Ocala, Florida.

A week prior to the wedding James was honored with a farewell stag dinner by his fellow officers at Air Corps Reserve Officers Training Camp. Major John B. Patrick the Post Commander was the toastmaster.

Eda wore a navy blue outfit of crepe trimmed in white with a 3/4 length matching flannel coat and all blue accessories. The flower on her shoulder was a white rosebud and lily of the valley corsage. A private dinner after the wedding was held at the Henry Grady Hotel with a centerpiece of pink roses and ferns, and included a 5 course meal.



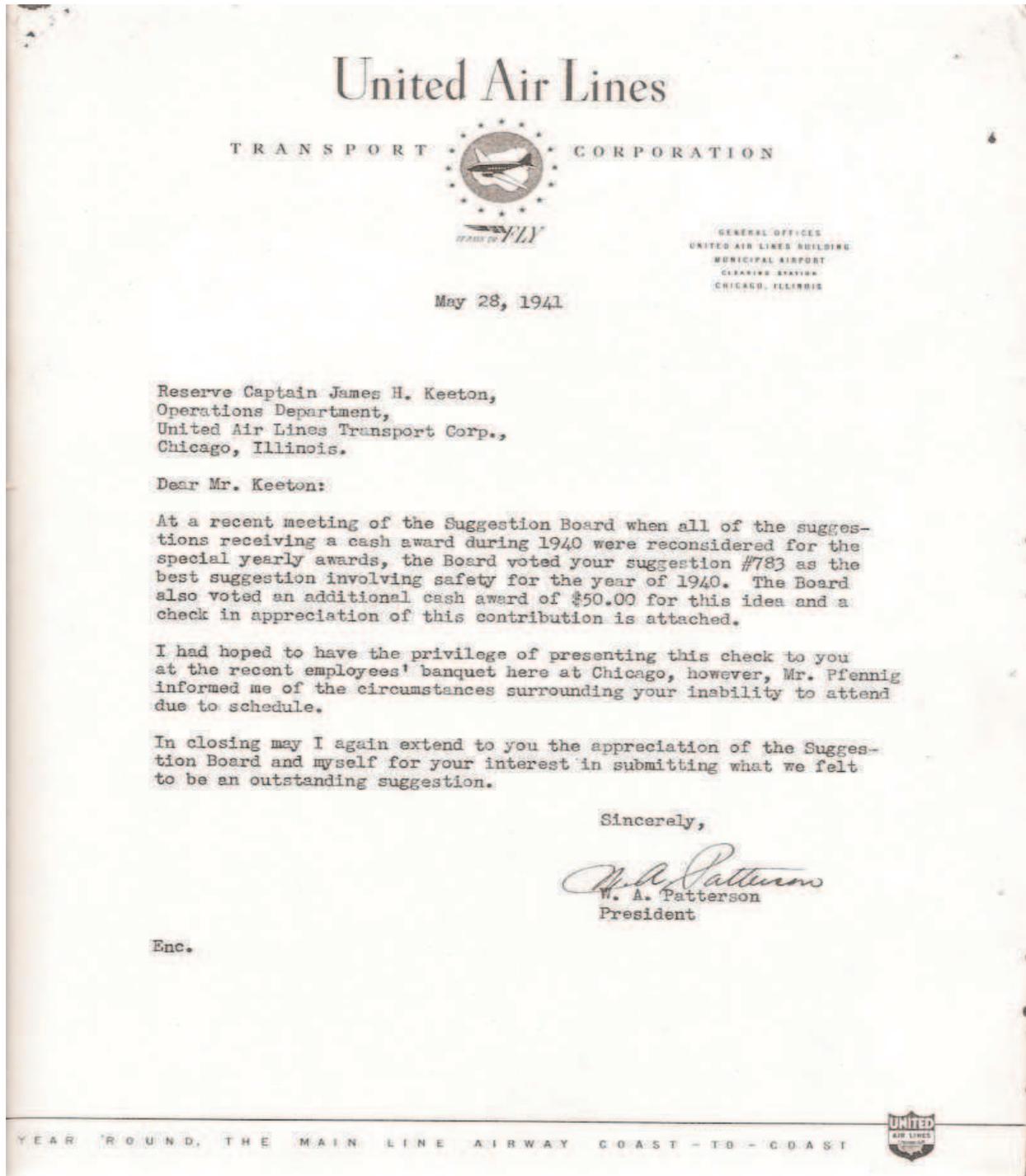
Henry Grady hotel in Atlanta, GA



Boeing 247-D circa 1933

In March 1936 James was hired by E.P. Lott as a co-pilot for United Airlines. His assignment was a 247-D. The 247-D's crew consisted of a pilot, co-pilot, and a stewardess and carried 10 passengers. James was stationed in Cleveland, Ohio and he flew the New York to Chicago route. He and Eda had two daughters Constance and Lelia.

In 1940 James was promoted to Captain with United Airlines and was now flying DC-3's. During World War II United Airlines worked with the Army, Navy, and Marines to place military pilots as co-pilots on passenger planes. James helped to train these military pilots in piloting transport aircraft. He received a citation for his outstanding efforts in this endeavor.



United Air Lines

TRANSPORT CORPORATION



GENERAL OFFICES
UNITED AIR LINES BUILDING
MUNICIPAL AIRPORT
CLEARING STATION
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

May 28, 1941

Reserve Captain James H. Keeton,
Operations Department,
United Air Lines Transport Corp.,
Chicago, Illinois.

Dear Mr. Keeton:

At a recent meeting of the Suggestion Board when all of the suggestions receiving a cash award during 1940 were reconsidered for the special yearly awards, the Board voted your suggestion #783 as the best suggestion involving safety for the year of 1940. The Board also voted an additional cash award of \$50.00 for this idea and a check in appreciation of this contribution is attached.

I had hoped to have the privilege of presenting this check to you at the recent employees' banquet here at Chicago, however, Mr. Pfennig informed me of the circumstances surrounding your inability to attend due to schedule.

In closing may I again extend to you the appreciation of the Suggestion Board and myself for your interest in submitting what we felt to be an outstanding suggestion.

Sincerely,

W. A. Patterson
W. A. Patterson
President

Enc.

YEAR ROUND, THE MAIN LINE AIRWAY COAST - TO - COAST





DC-3 Passenger Plane



DC- 3 Cockpit, one of the many planes that James flew as a pilot for United Airlines

24



Curtiss Robin Cockpit, the first plane that James flew in his career (though he learned on an OXX 6 Eagle Rock)

In 1943 James suggested a better method of approach in the landing of planes as well as a better distribution of the planes instruments in the cockpit winning an award from United Airlines for this idea. In 1948-49 James again won United Airlines award for 'Suggestions.' This time receiving \$1250. In this one he suggested a new routing pattern for incoming flights. This would save hours in time. This was the top award given that year. The summary read '... to avoid ATC delays of flights both east and west bound, landing at Bradley, Connecticut providing a route that bypasses and avoids Hartford Range holding area.

During the Korean War, James flew for United Airlines, working closely with the Military. James flew DC-4's full of cargo and troops on the Tokyo Airlift route. From 1952-1960 the Keetons lived in Meridian, Mississippi, James and Eda's hometown, for personal reasons.



DC-4 on take off

The move to Meridian may have been to become one of the executives with the Soule Steam Feed Works Business, while still flying Military Assistance Command (MAC) runs to South East Asia for United Airlines. His name appears in the front of several of the Payroll Books from 1952-1960, but no entries for him are within these Hourly Pay Time Books only his name in the front of the book stating that he was not in the payroll for that time period as an hourly employee.



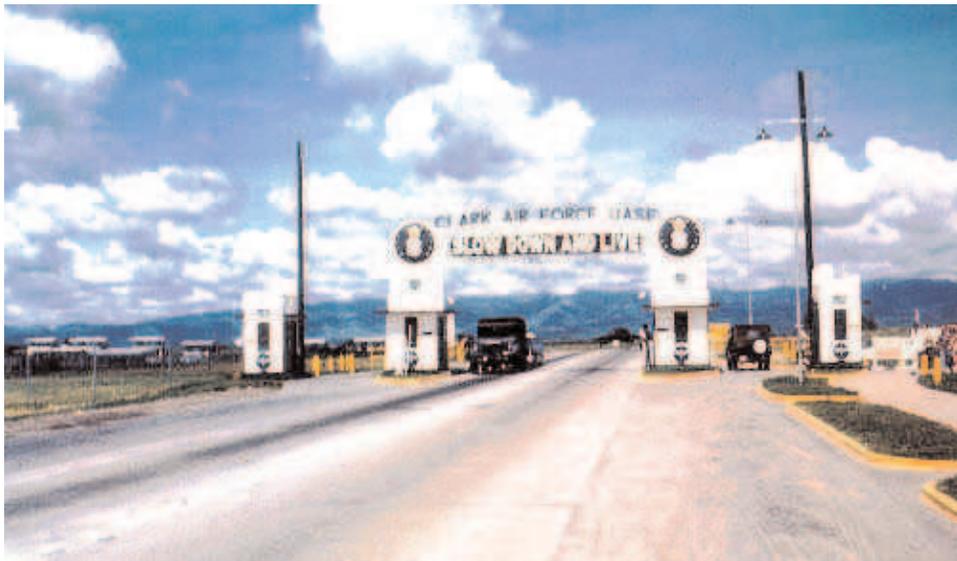
Soule Steam Feed Works was founded by Eda's father G.W. Soule, and was located on 20th Avenue and 4th Street, in Meridian, MS

By 1959 James had become rated on the DC-8 plane. He continued this MAC runs throughout Korean War and on into the Vietnam War during the 1960's on the "Bamboo Route." James moved his family to Nissequoqu River area in Long Island, New York, and then later to Magnolia Springs in Baldwin County, Alabama. Their daughter Connie married and became Connie Hoffman (later Connie Baker) and she remained in the New York home while attending College. Lelia had married Frank J. Martin, Jr. and lived in Washington D.C. during the 1960's.



DC-8 was the last plane that James was rated to fly while working for United Airlines

While the majority of pilots who flew MAC runs were based on the west coast in places such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle, James commuted from New York. With the move to Alabama, his commute just to get to work got even longer. James was number 64 of over 6,000 pilots on the United Airlines Roster, which gave him any route he wanted. He choose the “Bamboo Route” as he felt it was the least that he could do to help the United States Military. He would leave for New York, spend the night with Connie, then board another plane headed to Hawaii to pick up his crew and DC-8 bound for Vietnam or Thailand. They would make a brief stop at Wake Island for fuel then on to Clark Air Force Base in the Phillipines. They would be briefed by the Commander on what areas to avoid and pick up any additional cargo or soldiers bound for Vietnam.



Entrance to Clark Air Force Base

“I have seen artillery flashes as we’ve flown over,” he said. James prefers flying in bad weather on these missions as it causes the enemy fire to become confused. On approach for landing the area is lit up with flares, and a steep descent as possible is performed when near hostile territories. This allows the enemy less time to target the DC-8 and fire on the plane. While on the ground the entire crew remains with the plane and the plane is guarded constantly. When they are finally off loading the cargo or soldiers, they make a 5,000 foot per minute ascent

climbing as high as possible, again, in a effort to avoid enemy fire. Most of the landings James made was in Cam Rah Bay area and Da Nang.



Vietnam Map showing Da Nang on the shore line center of map. Cam Rah Bay was on the shore and several hundred miles South of Da Nang.



HEADQUARTERS MILITARY AIRLIFT COMMAND

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

CERTIFICATE OF

RECOGNITION and APPRECIATION

BE IT KNOWN TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, THAT:

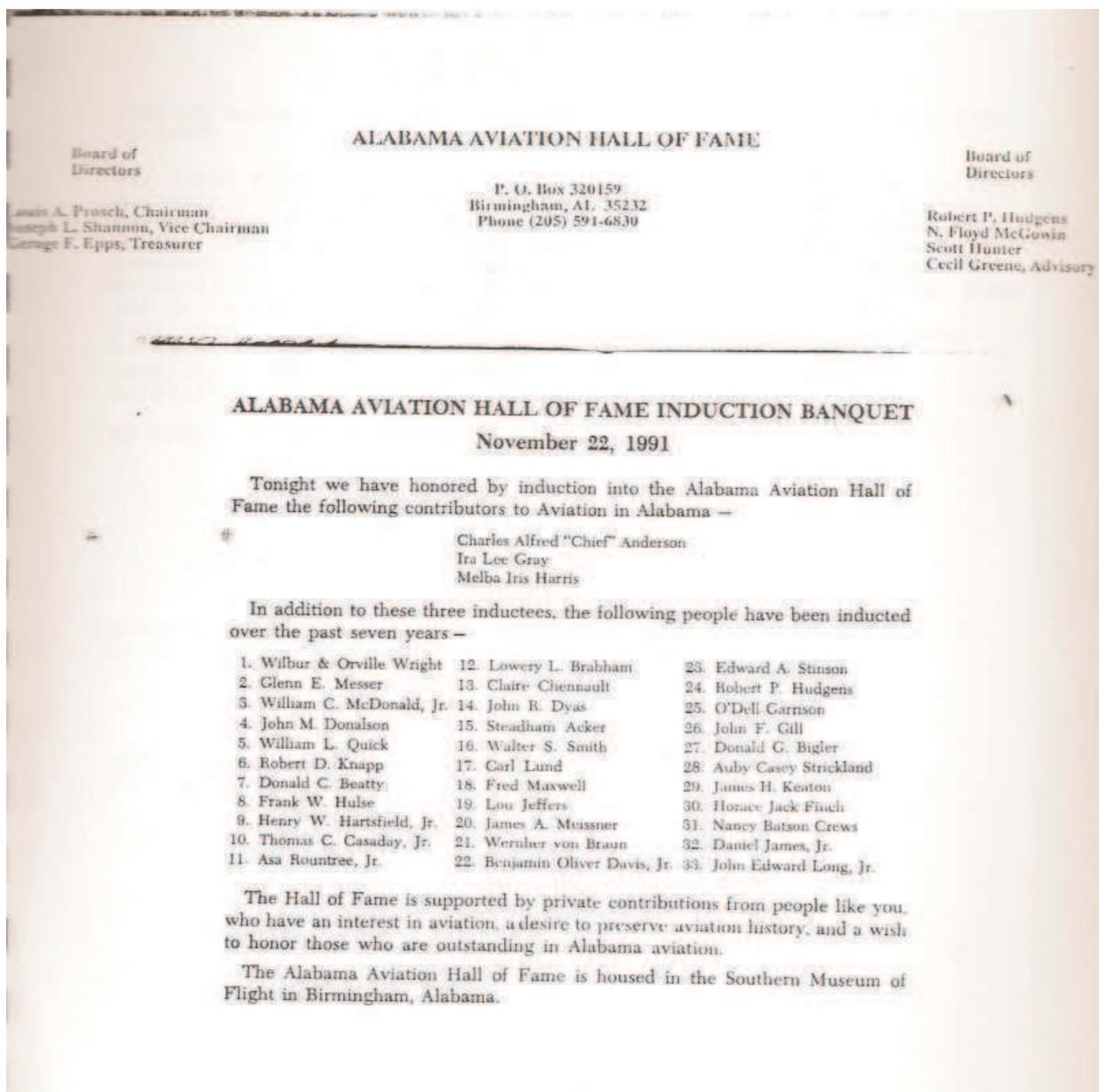
JAMES H. KEETON

While in the employ of United Air Lines, Inc. as a Captain, between August 15, 1966 and December 3, 1969 did perform an outstanding service to the United States of America by participating in sustained aerial support of the United States Armed Forces engaged in combat operations within the Republic of South Vietnam. In recognition of completing Thirty-nine Contract Airlift Logistical Support Missions for the Military Airlift Command, I extend to you my heartiest congratulations and award to you this certificate as a token of appreciation.

Given under my hand at Scott Air Force Base Illinois this 2nd day of April 1970 .


MAX J. CATTON, General, USAF
Commander

In 1970 after 40 years of flying as his own pilot and with United Airlines James retired. He and his wife Eda lived a peaceful, though still busy life, down at Magnolia Springs, Alabama on the Magnolia River where James loved to fish. He served two terms as President of the Magnolia Springs Community Association. He was also quite active with the Fairhope Power Squadron and was the founder of the Ancient Aviators of Baldwin County. In 1987 James was inducted into the Aviation Hall of Fame. The ceremony was held at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama. Dr. Frank M. Lugo of Mobile conducted the presentation.



In 1991 James took part in the "Historic Return" of the Mid-Air Refueling Mission to Key Field in Meridian.

SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON

FEB 27 1991

Mr James H. Keeton
Water Box 62
Magnolia Springs, Alabama 36555

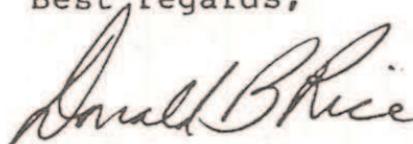
Dear Mr Keeton,

Please accept my personal thanks for your participation in the historic return of the midair refueling mission to Key Field, Meridian, Mississippi, on February 8, 1991. Your pioneering spirit during the record breaking flight in 1935 has had a direct and lasting effect on American airpower. The efforts put forth by you, A. D. Hunter, Bill Ward, and the Key brothers changed the course of aviation history.

Many lives and aircraft have been saved as a result of aerial refueling. Today tanker aircraft are refueling other aircraft safely, reliably, and routinely on an almost continuous, worldwide basis. The force multiplier represented by our nation's aerial tanker fleet makes American airpower premier among nations. The deterrence provided by the Strategic Air Command's long-range bomber aircraft is directly enhanced by their ability to be refueled while airborne. Your contributions toward the development of aerial refueling have helped keep ours a free nation.

For your past efforts, as well as your continued interest in American airpower, I salute you on behalf of all the men and women of the United States Air Force.

Best regards,



Donald B. Rice

In 1991 his wife of 55 years passed away. He later married Katherine Cross. On February 15, 2006, James left this earth to soar forever among the angels of heaven. He left behind his two daughters, Connie Baker of Phoenix, Arizona and Lelia Martin of Magnolia Springs, Alabama. His grandchildren were Martin Hoffman, Christina Cooper, Monique McFarland, Jessica Lane, Woodson Martin and James Martin. He also left behind his second wife Katherine and her children, Debi Anderson, John Baker, & David Baker. As of 2006 James had 16 great grandchildren. The services were held at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Meridian, and burial was at Magnolia Memory Gardens in Meridian. Soon after, on April 11, Katherine passed away while living in Beverly Health Care Center and was buried also at Magnolia Cemetery.

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