



EAA Chapter 166

Hartford, Connecticut

September 2026



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Steve Socolosky

Hello EAA166 members and student members!

Our next meeting, will be held on Saturday, September 26th, 2026, at 10 AM, at my hangar, weather permitting. Please be sure to see our REMINDER EMAIL on Friday for location confirmation.

Thanks to all of you who attended our last meeting! We had over 30 student members and members on a beautiful late summer day. Michael Thompson gave a fantastic, from-the-heart, enthusiastic account of his experiences at EAA's Air Academy Camp, which piggy-backed on the last days of Oshkosh and continued on for one week. Michael's energy and gratefulness to the Gauthier family for offering this scholarship, in memory of Joe Gauthier, was very much appreciated by everyone and especially Joe's wife, Carol and daughter Linda, who attended the meeting. Thank you Michael for a wonderful and inspirational presentation!

We also had newly-appointed Principal, Dr. Darry Saunders, in attendance at our meeting. Dr. Saunders would like her middle magnet STEM school to collaborate with us in educating them about everything aviation. We met a few days earlier and Dr. Saunders was very excited to learn what we do for young people, especially Young Eagles! It's still very early, but we're looking forward to helping all of these students.

Finally, we are now planning to hold a Young Eagles Rally on Saturday, October 17th. We will be finalizing plans at our September meeting and will have a Google form to sign up or you can send us an email if you'd like to help. Thanks!

That's it for now, I hope to see you all on Saturday, September 26th, at my hangar at Brainard Airport!

Thank you and BLUE SKIES!
Steve

NEXT MEETING

September 26,
2026 10:00am

Steve's hangar
Brainard Airport

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EAA Chapter 166



EAA 166



@EAA166

Girls In Aviation Day 2026



On Saturday, September 19th, EAA 166 promoted Young Eagles at the annual Girls In Aviation Day, headed by the Connecticut Chapter of Women in Aviation International and held at the Pratt & Whitney Hangar Museum. Thanks to all who helped out!



Aerospace Academy At Home

Join us for Aerospace Academy at Home, a new digital learning program that brings aerospace history, science, and technology right to your door.

NEAM Corner ...

Here's what's going on at the New England Air Museum

Check out the content on
our YouTube channel!



EAA166 Hartford, Connecticut

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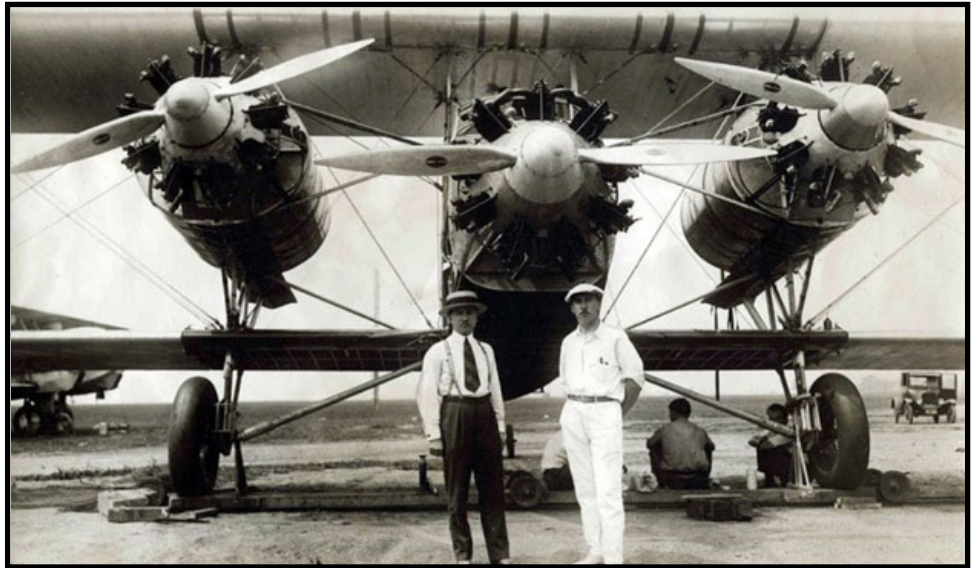
Sikorsky's Doomed Three-Engine S-35

by Bill Barry

One hundred years ago this month it was widely expected that the first non-stop flight across the Atlantic would soon happen on a huge airplane built by Igor Sikorsky. Despite the coming together of a “dream team” and lots of positive publicity, this effort would come to a tragic end—the victim of financial difficulties, personality conflicts, and a rushed testing program.

The effort was prompted by the \$25,000 Orteig Prize. Established in 1919, the prize would go to the first aviator to fly non-stop between New York and Paris. By the late 1920s, technology had advanced enough to make such a flight feasible. Creating a group that called themselves “The Argonauts, Inc,” veteran US Army pilot Homer Berry and Robert Jackson, a wealthy paper manufacturer from New Hampshire, commissioned Igor Sikorsky to build a large multi-engine plane for the flight.

While helicopters probably come to mind when you think of Sikorsky, he actually started building big airplanes in Russia in the early 20th Century. In fact, he designed the world's largest commercial airliner to date, the Ilya Muromets, in 1914. After emigrating to the United States in 1919, Sikorsky set his sights on building commercial airliners. The Sikorsky Aero Engineering Company's first product was the S-29A, a twin-engine 14-passenger airliner that debuted in the spring of 1924.



Two years later, work started on a twin-engine follow-on. This new design was the basis for the plane for the trans-Atlantic flight. The wings were extended to 101 feet and beefed up to hold more fuel, a third engine was added, and the structure was lightened so that the empty weight of the giant plane was only 8,000 pounds. Named the S-35, the highly streamlined (for the time) plane was capable of flying over 4,300 miles non-stop after launching at a maximum take off weight of 24,200 pounds. That's Rene Fonck (left) Igor Sikorsky (right) in front of the S-35 pictured above (source: Sikorskyarchives.com)

Although successful in publicizing their plans, the Argonauts were not so successful in raising money. Less than two weeks before the planned flight it became apparent that they had only raised \$20,000 of the \$100,000 cost of the S-35. Expecting that success would lead to more airplane orders, Sikorsky agreed to eat the \$80,000 shortfall. But this was not the only financial headache. The S-35 was designed for three 420 horsepower engines. The engines, which were built in France, were supposed to be provided free of charge. This windfall was, apparently, one of the prime reasons why French World War I ace Rene Fonck was hired to be the chief pilot by the Argonauts. However, Fonck wasn't able to deliver the engines for free after all. The sponsors were presented with an additional \$43,000 bill for the three engines.

Hiring Fonck brought a slew of other difficulties. The leading western ace of World War I, Fonck was credited with 75 kills, but claimed to have shot down up to 50 more. A fighter ace who came with high demands, Fonck was earning \$250 per week and was given control over who would be on the crew. The first casualty was Homer Berry, one of the originators of the project who expected to fly as copilot. Fonck forced him off the crew on September 4, and replaced him with a navigator. Over the next 10 days three different people served as navigator before Fonck settled on US Navy Lt. William Curtin. Flight engineer G. O. Neville also left the team around

this time when Fonck nixed an endorsement deal regarding the engine oil that Neville had arranged. Fonck brokered his own oil endorsement and reportedly pocketed the cash himself. Some sources report that Sikorsky was irked by Fonck's demands that the scrupulously lightweight cabin be enhanced with red satin, mahogany and leather fittings.

The flight-testing program for the S-35, suffered from the same problems that troubled the rest of the effort. Sikorsky had been told that he would have six weeks to conduct a full flight test effort. In part, this was to make up for his financial losses on the S-35. By setting high-profile new speed, altitude and load-carrying records, it was hoped, he would win public acclaim and future orders. However, test flights ended after two weeks and numerous changes were made to the aircraft in the following two weeks—changes that weren't flight tested.

The first attempt to launch to Paris came on September 16, 1926. However, a major fuel leak kept the S-35 on the ground at Roosevelt Field in New York. Four days of bad weather followed. Finally, on September 21, 1926, Fonck, Curtin, radio operator Charles Clavier and flight engineer Jacob Islamoff boarded the heavily laden plane. In fact, just prior to takeoff it was discovered that the plane was 4,000 pounds over the designed maximum. Due to the shortened test program, flights at heavy weights also hadn't been tested, neither had substantial changes to the landing gear. Once the takeoff roll began Fonck's inexperience with large aircraft showed. Some of the landing gear modifications failed as they rolled down the runway. When the rear wheel fell off, the tail dug into the turf runway, slowing the plane. When the S-35 reached the end of the runway it rolled over the edge of a berm and disappeared downhill. In the explosion that followed Fonck and Curtin were thrown clear. Clavier and Islamoff were trapped in the wreckage and died in the fire.

Amazingly, Sikorsky agreed to build a new plane so that Fonck could try again. The S-37 was nearly complete when Charles Lindbergh won the Orteig Prize in May 1927. It was sold off and flew as a passenger airliner in South America until it was scrapped in 1930.

Images below: The side view of the S-35 biplane and the S-35 with barrels of fuel and oil ready to load for the flight to Paris (Source: Sikorskyarchives.com)



Flight Advisor: Lessons Learned From An In-Flight Emergency

by Ken Katz

On one leg of my flight to EAA AirVenture 2026, I had an electrical system problem in IMC and declared an emergency. The flight ended safely with a diversion. The successful conclusion of this flight has several lessons learned that are worth sharing.

1: Before every flight, I brief a general approach to handling emergencies.

- Maintain aircraft control
- Analyze the situation
- Take appropriate action
- Maintain situational awareness
- Declare an emergency
- Land as soon as possible

This approach worked very well and is worth memorizing.

2: Particularly in an emergency, use every resource available to you. The emergency increases your workload and the associated stress decreases your ability to handle the workload. Offload every task that you can to your passenger in the front right seat (to the extent that your passenger has the skills and ability to be helpful) and ATC.

3: If your aircraft has vacuum-powered instruments and the vacuum system and instruments are working properly, then you will have attitude and heading information as long as the engine is running. We all are familiar with the shortcomings and risks of vacuum-powered instruments, so many aircraft now have electric-powered flight instrumentation with liquid crystal displays and solid-state sensors instead of vacuum-powered instruments. These instruments provide more accurate and richer information in a user-friendly format and are more reliable than vacuum-powered instruments. They do have a hidden risk that needs to be considered. Dependent as they are on the electrical system of the aircraft, they typically have an internal back-up battery to supply electrical power in the event of electrical system failure. The problem is that the back-up battery has a finite charge. When the electrical system fails, the clock is ticking on the back-up battery. In IMC, landing before the battery charge is expended is a time-critical and essential task.

4: It is helpful to have portable battery-powered equipment such a handheld VHF communications radio to use in the event of electrical system failure. However, during an emergency, you might not have the time to retrieve your portable equipment from your flight bag in the back seat. Any portable equipment that you might use in the event of an emergency needs to be within arm's reach and ready to use, including a fully-charged battery.

Learning from the experiences of others is always a valuable thing to do.

EAA 166 Member Activities



Past Ray Scholar, Logan Vidal and Joe Gauthier Memorial Scholarship recipient, Michael Thompson, took turns flying with Steve to Kline Kill, NY (NY1) for a pancake breakfast where they met up with Dave Armando (in his R-44) and friends. The weather was spectacular! Then, we all flew to Southbridge Airport, (3B0) for hot dogs and hamburgers for lunch!





Hangar



Hanger

... just so we're all on the same page !