



Wally's first plane, a used CURTISS JENNY, parked on the ice
near the Shipyard Marina in Detroit Harbor

Wally's first plane - on the ice in
Detroit Harbor in front of Claude
Cornelli. (near Muma's Marina).

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Lieut. Walter Arntzen, shown above at the controls of his Stinson Detroiter monoplane, flew through to Sault Ste. Marie yesterday afternoon with the first airmail flight of the Upper Peninsula. Three other Upper Peninsula pilots, scheduled to carry the mail in National Airmail Week flights, were grounded at Marquette when the "ceiling" dropped to 100 feet. Arntzen encountered mist and rain on his flight to the Soo, but the "ceiling" remained high enough to permit safe flying. The picture above was made shortly after Lieut. Arntzen landed at the local airport at 6 o'clock last night after completing the round trip to the Soo. Additional pictures of the flight, made by a Daily Press photographer who accompanied Arntzen, may be found on page five of this issue.

DAILY PRESS

June 1, 1961 17



President John Walbridge of the Escanaba Lions Clubs presents a check for \$1,339.67 to Lieut. Walter Arntzen, of the Project Pride staff which is building a handsome new structure with volunteer labor and materials bought with gifts to house the Escanaba...

11 F 13

Good Morning!

By The Bugler

PATHWAY IN THE SKY
Thursday morning Wally Arntzen of Pioneer Aviation telephoned to ask whether we would like to fly to Iron Mountain to attend a meeting where there was to be a discussion of Upper Peninsula airport facilities. We said yes, and he said to be at the airport at 11 o'clock.



Dunathan

At the airport we found Loren Jenkins, city engineer, Councilman "Pat" Gasman, and Fred Sensiba of Pioneer Aviation as our companions on the trip. The flight was to be made in Pioneer Aviation's new twin-engine five-passenger Cessna. Wally calls it a "plush job." The interior of the plane is upholstered, air-conditioned and as comfortable as your automobile. There are ash trays for smokers, and it is quiet enough so you can carry on a conversation. Wally was at the controls and Fred sat beside him. The three passengers were in the "back" seat.

SCOOTING ALONG—We had not been in an airplane for a dozen or so years. And that was on a flight from St. Ignace to Beaver Islands and return with Bud Hammond, who used to fly mail and passengers here and there in the eastern part of the Upper Peninsula. Last we heard of him he was working for Abram's Aerial Survey at Lansing. After the takeoff on the northwest-southeast runway at Escanaba's airport, Wally lifted the Cessna higher. While closer to the trees seemed to zip past at astounding speed. Now the trees below was a flat, unrolling panorama. The hills were toothpick high, and the villages of Escanaba and Bark River were in the kind the kids buy in the store. The villages of Escanaba and Bark River were in the moment, the next became a blur.

st, Wally?" Pat Gasman asked. Wally replied, "150 at 100 DO—Somehow we had to become excited about a speed of 150 miles an hour at an altitude of 2,000 feet. Because we were without a sensation of speed. With 2,000 feet away it slides past without the blur. It accompanies a speed of 100 miles an hour in a car. The others were talking about the matter-of-fact things that attracted our attention to looking out of the plane, and the engine cowling on our side. The cowling is painted red—nice. There are rivets holding the cowling together and—we have a strong steel frame underneath. The propeller is made of a fine metallic alloy. Its speed is so fast that only a fine metallic line is visible in the air where the propeller is working up much about the possibility of flying. We began wondering if it would happen if the wing...

roads, and scattered a few farm houses here and there.

In one open field we noticed what appeared to be ski tracks and the... field revealed them to be car or sleigh tracks. for they were as wide as the roadways. The height had deceived us.

The towns of Loretto, of Vulcan and Norway slipped beneath. The countryside was rough with hills and scarred with mining operations. Iron Mountain and Kingford were beneath, and the slide at Pine Mountain—highest artificial ski slide in the world.

poked up at us. Today thousands of people will attend the national ski meet there, watching men of wooden runners trying to fly 200 or more feet through the air. They leave the end of the runway going 60 miles an hour. The Iron Mountain airport has a fine winter surface, made by packing the snow with heavy rollers.

ADMIRATION—At Iron Mountain airport Wally's plane came for attention from other pilots. The way they talked about it, we knew we had been riding in something special for this part of the country. All during the meeting we would remark in an offhand manner to friends of ours from other cities that "we just flew over with Wally."

COMING HOME—After the meeting in Iron Mountain we took off again for Escanaba. With a tail wind the speed of the plane was greater and we climbed 2,500 feet—just beneath scattering clouds that laid long shadows across the countryside below.

We zoomed over Omer Taquay's house just north of Bark River. From there you could look far south and see a faint smudge of smoke at Menominee. Out of Green bay you could see the dark outline of Chambers island, and beyond that Door county in Wisconsin. To the southeast was the higher blur of Washington Island. Straight ahead was Escanaba. farther east the snow-covered top of Little Bay de Noc. Then the Stonington peninsula made a patterned strip, and on the other side was Big Bay de Noc. Beyond the Garden Peninsula loomed—and on the horizon was Lake Michigan.

After the landing all of us except Wally left the plane. He took off again on his way to Iron Mountain to fly a Menominee delegation home. He would be home for supper.

—Clint Dunathan.

IRON MOUNTAIN—Far to the west the horizon merged into low bank of scattered clouds. The sun shone on us brightly. Satisfied with the wing, we began looking at the ground again. We were flying over a comparatively unsettled...

MONDAY, JUNE 21, 1948

Twenty Years Ago

DAILY PRESS

Escanaba, May 21, 1950

Twenty Years Ago

Lieut. Wally Arntzen had the honor of being the first to carry mail by air in Upper Michigan. His plane made a circuit of several of the largest cities in...



FLYING ARCHITECTS

At age twenty-one, Wally enlisted in the army, in a division then known as the U.S. Air Service. Like Charles Lindbergh in the class before him, Wally learned to fly at Kelly Field, near San Antonio, Texas. His schooling included instruction in navigation, aerodynamics, motors and their component parts, and weaponry for different kinds of military aircraft. Wally's friend, Jon Thorin, told me Arntzen only enlisted so he could learn how to fly. Once the course was over, he resigned his commission as lieutenant and joined the reserves.

Co-founder of U. P. Airways and later Escanaba's first airport manager and flight instructor, Wally often flew here on weekends in the thirties. He taught Claude Cornell, Mary Richter's brother, how to fly and Cornell then purchased the Island's first airplane, a four passenger Stinson. George Mann, Jr. and Raymond Richter* were also pupils of his.

*You may wish to note that Raymond Richter was from the Island. His place of residence is not listed on the roster of Wally's students.

Hannes Anderson recalls that as a teenager, it was his job to mow the field west of the Anderson farm buildings on Main Road, a task that normally took a full half day to accomplish:

I hitched old Dick and Flossy, the gray mare, to the mower and began cutting. Even though Dick was years older than Flossy, he always did the most work. Each horse was hitched to a whippletree, which in turn was fastened to a device called an evener. The evener pivoted in the center and the driver could easily tell which horse was pulling the hardest. Dick's side of the evener was always thrust forward while Flossy's was always hanging backward.

Suddenly the sound of Wally Arntzen's plane filled the air and Flossy's ears perked up and the position of the evener was reversed. As Wally was selling barnstorming rides, using Charlie Schmidt's field where the bank is now located, he made repeated flights passing over our west field. I had to tighten down on the reins to keep Flossy at a slow trot. I finished the field shortly after 11 a.m., returned the horses to the barn and fed them.

When I entered the house, Ma asked "What happened? Did the mower break down?"

I replied "No, I finished mowing the field." She seriously doubted me until I said, "Ma, any time you want to get real work out of old Flossy, just get an airplane overhead!"

Between 1936 and 1938, Wally made regularly-scheduled weekly flights

from the Island to Green Bay and Escanaba, a venture that ultimately failed due to insufficient traffic.

Dozens of Islanders experienced the thrill of their first flight with Wally. He was a "regular" at Tom Nelson's "bitters" bar and sometimes he would arrive after dark and have to buzz the tavern until friends heard him and drove to the airport . Once there, they would turn on their headlights so he could make a safe landing . . . Just as the French did when Lindbergh landed at Paris in '27.

Wally's first move after he returned from Texas was to purchase a used Curtiss Jenny, a biplane with two open cockpits. The price was the then astronomical figure of six hundred dollars!

Wally taught his wife how to fly and served as a test pilot for a Menominee company . And for a time he managed as Escanaba flight school for returning servicemen who financed their lessons through the G.I. Bill.

Many Islanders, like Arni Richter, recall Wally's skill as a barnstormer in the tradition of "Waldo Pepper".

And they remember with gratitude his prompt aid whenever a rescue search or medical transportation was needed.

More than any other person, Wally Arntzen personified aviation to this community. His flights here were popular events long remembered. In time, he became an Island legend.

World War II interrupted his visits: Wally was busy

ferrying bombers to Europe and Africa. He recorded over 1850 hours of flight time in the three and a half years he served with the Air Transport Command.

The first pilot to carry the mail in the U. P., Wally was supremely confident and would fly any time he could start his engine. Despite the dangers of his chosen profession, he died of natural causes at Escanaba in 1984.

A U. P. historian tells us that "whenever some of the 'oldtimers' get together to discuss the early days of aviation in the Delta County area, the conversation inevitably centers around 'Wally' Arntzen." And so it does here on Washington Island.

He was a pioneer aviator no Islander who ever met him will ever forget.

G. Berquist
Washington Island Archives
15 July 1993