

HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN HELICOPTER SOCIETY, INC.

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February, 1956, marks the 12th anniversary of the founding of The American Helicopter Society, Inc.

This organization was founded in Bridgeport, Connecticut, by a small group of engineers of the Sikorsky Aircraft Division, who were interested in the dissemination of information on rotating-wing aircraft. Although a few meetings on rotating wing had already taken place as far back as 1939 in Philadelphia, under the auspices of such people as E. Burke Wilford, Capt. Ralph Barnaby, Ralph McClarren, and Paul Thomas, it was felt that a more closely organized group might better serve the industry as a whole.

For the purpose of greater integration, Ralph Alex, Clinton Strong, Chester Mayerson, Edward Katzenberger, and Philip Blackford cooperated on the establishment of The Sikorsky Helicopter Club. An organization so limited in scope, however, could not be expected to attract and hold the attention of the entire rotating-wing industry, and for this reason, a committee of the above mentioned people was formed to explore the possibilities of an organized scientific society.

On February 25, 1943, a meeting was held in the Stratford High School for the purpose of discussing the organization, aims, and objectives of the new society. Mr. Katzenberger, President pro tem of the Society, suggested that the primary interest of the group should be the engineering aspects of the helicopter, and while this has been the case through the years, the operational and maintenance aspects of the industry have not been overlooked.

The drafting of a constitution was immediately undertaken by Messrs. Alex, Strong, Mayerson, Katzenberger, and Blackford who, after 2½ months' work, developed the document which through many changes and amendments has now become the Constitution of The American Helicopter Society, Inc.

With the basic necessities adequately organized, the members of the Society elected Ralph Alex of Sikorsky to the first presidency. Other officers elected at this time were Donald Plumb, Vice-President, William Costuck, Secretary, Eli Cohen, Treasurer, and Professor Igor A. Sikorsky, first Technical Chairman. The first technical meeting of the new Society was held in Bridgeport, Conn., on February 4, 1944.

The first American Helicopter Society Forum was held at the Engineers Club in Philadelphia on April 3, 1945, under the chairmanship of Paul W. Thomas. This first meeting was scheduled for one

day, and covered a wide range of subjects on which some 13 speakers presented their ideas to the gathering. This was the start of the annual Forums now held regularly by the Society, and was also the beginning of a very select organization known as the "Whirly Birds," with a membership restricted only to those who soloed in a helicopter prior to V-J Day.

It is, incidentally, interesting to note that the Society refers to the recent Forum held on the West Coast as the Second Annual Western Forum. This, in fact, may not be altogether correct, since during the time when Robert G. Anderson was President in 1946, the first meeting was held on the West Coast under the chairmanship of Gilbert McGill. Whether or not this could have been termed a Forum or simply a regional affair cannot be determined; but to all intents and purposes, it was the first meeting on the subject of rotating wing held in that area of the country.

For the next few years, the Forums were again held in Philadelphia. The Third Annual Forum, held in 1947, was of particular historical interest as the Society's first exhibit of rotating-wing aircraft. This exhibit, under the chairmanship of Louis Levitt, was held at the Central Airport in Camden, N. J., where all of the helicopters current at that time, as well as several of historical interest, were displayed to the public. Although by present standards the number of ships exhibited was limited, it was of great interest to all, since it was the first time that so many different types of helicopters had been shown en masse.

The 5th Annual Forum, held in 1949, occurred in New York City, but the 6th took place in Philadelphia, in 1950. All subsequent Forums have been held in Washington, D. C., and have included the usual two days of technical sessions and the Society's annual helicopter display, with the exception of 1952, when a gasoline strike curtailed helicopter operation.

In 1949, the late Dr. Alexander Klemin, who was President at that time, realized that the Society would not survive without additional aid from an outside source, and he approached the Institute of the Aeronautical Sciences with the proposal that the American Helicopter Society affiliate itself with that organization. Through the untiring efforts of Dr. Klemin and Frank N. Piasecki, who was President of the Society in 1950, an affiliation agreement from which the Society was to benefit greatly was signed with the Institute in that year.

Until that time, there had been no central office for the Society, and Society affairs were conducted by officers living in different parts of the country. The need for a centrally located office became readily apparent, and to this end the officers of the Society and the Institute appointed the Society's first full time Executive Secretary in September, 1952.

During the 9th Annual Forum, held in Washington in May, 1953, the Society introduced an innovation: namely, a trade exposition, which provides helicopter manufacturers with an opportunity to exhibit their products not only to Society members, but to the general public as well. This feature has been continued through all succeeding Forums on the East Coast, and this year was initiated as a portion of the Western Forum as well.

In 1954, the Executive Board of the Society, at the request of its membership West of the Mississippi, held the first Western Annual Forum. This meeting, which is now held annually, will eventually compare in size and significance with that of the annual Forum in the East. While no helicopter display was held, it is not unlikely that this feature may be included in future Western Forums.

The American Helicopter Society instituted the granting of Honorary Fellowships in the year 1944. These awards, "for meritorious service in the advancement of rotating-wing aeronautics," were presented in the early days of the Society at the national banquet, but lately the presentations have been a feature of the Honors Night Dinners at the annual Forums. First presented to Igor I. Sikorsky in 1944, other outstanding individuals in the rotating-wing field have been the recipients of this award. In 1951, two new awards were established, the first of which, the Society's top award, is a plaque given by Frank N. Piasecki, "To honor the memory of Dr. Alexander Klemin, eminent aeronautical engineer, educator, author, and outstanding pioneer in rotating-wing aeronautics." Igor I. Sikorsky was also the first recipient of the Alexander Klemin Award, presented to him for "notable achievement in the advancement of rotating-wing aeronautics."

In addition to the Journal of the American Helicopter Society, the organization also prints the American Helicopter Society Newsletter. This monthly publication comprises current newsworthy data relative to events within the industry.

The Proceedings of the annual Forums of the organization, both the National and Western, are printed following each meeting and are available to the membership as well as to other interested individuals and organizations.

From time to time, the Society also prints both technical and non-technical papers which have been presented at its regional meetings for dissemination to its membership.

The following is a list of the past Presidents of the Society:

Ralph Alex	1944-45
C. L. Morris	1945-46
R. G. Anderson	1946-47
Richard Prewitt	1947-48
Ralph Lightfoot	1948-49
Dr. Alexander Klemin (deceased)	1949-50
Frank Piasecki	1950-51
Bartram Kelley	1951-52
T. R. Pierpoint	1952-53
C. W. Lefever	1953-54
J. P. W. Vest	1954-55

The American Helicopter Society is presently divided into 6 regions covering the continental United States only. Certain regions have been sub-divided into sections to afford greater local interest and activity. Such sections as Fort Rucker, Ala., Fort Eustis, Va., and Los Angeles, are concrete examples of the Society's efforts to localize interest in its activities. This type of sub-division allows local membership to get together not only on a technical basis, but also affords them the opportunity to meet one another at certain social events planned during the year.

Aside from the Society's American membership, it is also fortunate in numbering many engineers and executives from abroad. Included are such countries as: Australia, Bolivia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, England, France, Germany, Guatemala, Holland, Ireland, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Switzerland, Sweden, and Venezuela.

The Society's membership stands in the neighborhood of 1500 people, including engineers, manufacturing administrative executives, as well as military and civilian pilots and operators. It is the firm belief of the officers that by breaking the membership groups down within the regions it tends to stimulate greater interest in the Society's aims and objectives.

During the year, cooperation between the Society and other engineering organizations takes place, a good example of which is the one full day technical program put on in cooperation with the Institute of the Aeronautical Sciences at the Institute's annual meeting held in January of each year. At this function technical papers on various subjects are presented by leading engineers in their particular fields of endeavor, much in the same way as those given at the Society's own annual Forums. Participation with other organizations such as the Society of Automotive Engineers, the American Rocket Society, and the American Society of Mechanical Engineers also becomes a part of the Society's activities as opportunities arise for such participation.

Government of the Society rests in the hands of the President and members of its Executive Board. Officers of the Society are elected by written ballot of the membership on an annual

basis - their terms of office running from one annual Forum to the next. At the head of each region is a Vice-President who completely manages and governs the activities within his region. He is responsible for the activities within the sections of his region and section chairmen report to him on the activities of their particular locality. In addition to the President and Vice-Presidents, the Society elects a Secretary and a Treasurer. Chairmen of various functions within the Society are appointed by the President and the Executive Board. Featured in these appointments are such people as the Forum Chairman, whose responsibility it is to carry out the functions of the Society's annual meetings; Publicity Chairman, whose duties include publicity attendant upon the national functions held at different times of the year in different sections of the country; the Awards Chairman, who heads the committee charged with the responsibility of choosing the awardees for the Society's awards each year; a Membership Chairman, whose duty it is to keep the Society constantly growing in size; and one of the most important officials of the organization, the Technical Director, with whom rests the responsibility for the selection of technical papers of high quality for presentation before the Society's meetings. The Technical Director also acts as Editor of the Journal of the American Helicopter Society and as Chairman of the Editorial Board of the Journal.

The Executive Secretary and his staff are also responsible to the President of the Society and are charged with the overall management of Society affairs at the instruction of the Executive Board.

Needless to say, through the years the Society has taken many steps in furthering its purpose in life; namely: "the dissemination of technical and non-technical information to the rotating wing industry." It is my belief that a long and prosperous future lies ahead for the organization due to the ever-increasing interest in its activities shown not only by its own membership but by industry and the man on the street as well.



Ralph Alex, First President of The American Helicopter Society, Inc., 1944-1945.



Dr. Alexander Klemm (deceased), President of The American Helicopter Society, Inc., 1949-1950.