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# A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

## —Igor Ivan Sikorsky

by Norman F. Dacey

**A**WAY back in 1910, about all that the average American knew about the Russians was that they wore funny fur hats because it was so cold, they had a czar who sent them to Siberia if he didn't like their looks, and they drank vodka and rode in droschkas, or perhaps they drank droschka and rode in vodkas. It didn't seem very important, anyhow.

It would have been hard to persuade an American citizen that at that time there was a young Russian boy of twenty, with an enviable technical college training, who was beginning to build flying machines. And the Russian youth who had been experimenting with helicopters for two years was Igor Ivan Sikorsky.

As far back as 1908, Sikorsky built a helicopter; in 1910, he built one which lifted itself from the ground. And then he built the S-1, powered with a 15-horsepower motor which flew the ship. Followed the S-2 which flew 600 feet with its 25-horsepower, and the S-3, which flew 59 seconds with 40-horsepower to hold it aloft.

What happened to them when these first S ships got through flying is difficult to find out. They flew—and then young Sikorsky built another one!

Sikorsky is always described as a man of vision, a dreamer. Reading between the lines of this account of his early activities, it is evident that he was resourceful, courageous and determined.

Where did he get the money to build airplanes in those years when nobody believed that man would ever fly and that a flying machine was just the insane visualization of a demented mind? How did he have the nerve to take off in the thing when he got it built? How did he have the patience to go on after the little S ships crashed and crashed?

As a matter of fact, Sikorsky did get a little impatient after the first few crack-ups, and he began to wonder if there wasn't more to the business of actually flying than he had at first imagined. Perhaps the ships themselves were all right; perhaps they crashed because he didn't know how to ma-



neuver them well enough. Perhaps—he decided—he'd better find out how the people who made a business of flying actually did their stuff.

So he hied him to an airport (yes, they had airports in Russia in 1911), and watched. Then he went back and taught himself to fly. So successful was he, that to this day, no one has ever been able to teach him the newer, modern methods. At that time the control wires were arranged exactly opposite to what they are now.

If you wanted to make a right bank, you used the right pedal; left bank, left pedal. Nowadays, it is exactly the reverse. But today, if Mr. Sikorsky wishes to take a plane, it is necessary for the mechanics to reverse the control wires for Mr. Sikorsky learned to fly that way and can fly no other. Anyhow, he maintains the old system was just as good, if not better.

In 1911, the S-4 attained a height of 1,500 feet and stayed there a full hour. Business began to look up. It became obvious to everyone that this young Sikorsky had an idea and an idea which could be made to work. It

turned out that he had other ideas as well—ideas about multi-motored ships and seaplanes and all sorts of things that no one had ever tried.

So impressed were his confreres that the Russo-Baltic railroad car works decided to stand back of him and see what this young designer, plus unlimited capital, could do.

At the end of two years, the new multi-motored ship was completed. Four 100-horsepower engines and a roomy cabin were among the notable features. It made 50 successful flights with Sikorsky at the controls.

Many things happened in Europe in the year 1914. Among other things, it marked the construction of the first multi-motored seaplane. It shattered all world records for distance, lifting, endurance and altitude. Rather an impressive achievement for a chap of 26.

From then on Sikorsky no longer had the backing of the Russo-Baltic company. He did have, however, the backing of the Imperial Russian government whose resources were fully as great and whose interest in aviation was even greater. They commissioned Sikorsky to build them 73 big, multi-motored bombing planes for immediate war service. Only one of the lot was lost.

With the Russian revolution, Sikorsky's triumph came to an abrupt end. The distinguished and wealthy young designer, feted and lionized by royalty, became a penniless emigre to France. His indomitable courage—the same courage that carried him undiscouraged through years of nerve-wracking experimentation—stayed with him.

His only thought was of beginning again. He had barely begun laying out plans for new planes when the Armistice came. The Allies had planned to use as many as he could turn out. But the Armistice wrote "finis" to Sikorsky's work just as surely as the Russian revolution had done before.

Where to go? America, the land of opportunity. America, the rich. America, the place where so many pioneers



in the fields of science and inventions seem to have gathered. In 1919, Sikorsky came to America.

Picture him. He had no money. He spoke little English. He came, though, with bright hopes that America would want to forge ahead in aviation, so little developed here but so definitely proven necessary by war experiences.

Picture America in 1919. The Armistice. Ships, guns, supplies piled up and no market. Thousands turned out of work by the closing of war factories. The American doughboys home looking for jobs. Too much of everything but money and work and not enough of these to go around.

Arrives a young Russian who wants to build an airplane which will cost somewhere in the neighborhood of \$100,000. If the Revolution and the Armistice were tragedies to Sikorsky, how much worse must have been his arrival in America!

How he got on during the next few years, he seldom describes. He had a remarkable knowledge of astronomy and an unusual grounding in mathematics and among other things, after his English improved, he picked up a little by lecturing. They were years of hardship and discouragement.

About that time, 1923, Mr. Bary enters the picture—W. A. Bary, who is now vice-president and general manager of the Sikorsky Aviation Corporation. Mr. Bary had had a successful manufacturing business in Russia, had come to the United States because of the Revolution and had begun a little business in downtown New York City.

Gradually, drawn by common interests, there had come together in his shipping room a little group of Russian naval officers, first six, then eight, and finally, twelve. These young Russians had been together at the naval college, they had fought side by side in the civil war and they knew what it meant to experience hardship. They knew what it was to stick together. Of these, two were flyers and one was a draughtsman. The latter was the only professional man besides Sikorsky, who ran across them and joined their little group.

This little, tightly-knit Russian group pooled their resources and found that they had \$600. They began work with an old draughting table in the back of Bary's packing room.

Here was laid the foundation for what is today the Sikorsky Aviation Corporation. Naturally, it was impossible to build a plane with a 100-foot wingspread in the back of Bary's packing room. Sikorsky suggested that they transfer their activities to a little farm which he had purchased down at

Roosevelt, L. I. They looked the place over and decided that the place to build the new plane was in the chicken-coop. And there it was built.

As the plane neared completion, the coop had to be extended here and there to cover a new portion of the wing which had just been added or to allow for this or that addition. I was necessary to disassemble the coop to get it out and it came forth like a chicken bursting from its shell covering.

The result was the S-29, a tremendous success. It carried 14 passengers and once took two grand pianos from New York to Washington. Governor Trumbull of Connecticut spoke over the radio from the cabin of the S-29, the first time anyone had ever broadcasted from a plane. It visited every state in the Union. It flew more than 500,000 miles and was finally crashed intentionally in a movie thriller. Its history is epic.

The year 1927, saw the construction of the first multi-motored amphibian, the forerunner of the S-38, which has been turned out in large quantities during the past two years. The company has become one of the leaders in the field of aviation in America.

## THE INVESTOR

With aviation stocks changing position rapidly in an industry complicated by swift growths and rapid amalgamations, the opportunities for both wise and unwise investment are large. It is only on the basis of accurate and newest information that proper judgment of value may be achieved.

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"What," Mr. Bary was asked, "does Mr. Sikorsky like to do best?"

"Oh, fly, of course," he replied. "But we do not let him. We put every difficulty in his way. He is too valuable; we need him all the time for other things."

Isn't that the irony of fate? After all these trials and tribulations, the thing that he wants most to do, to fly the gigantic ships which he creates, is denied him.

"Vice-president in charge of all engineering activities" is Mr. Sikorsky's present title in the corporation. He is never so happy as when looking over someone's shoulder at blue prints and telling them what changes to make.

He would like to design new planes as often as it is practicable. For a designer, the test flight is the big thrill. Production on a large scale interests him not at all.

Igor Ivan Sikorsky now lives in a modest little white house in Stratford, Conn., only a short distance from the huge new aircraft works which bears his name. He takes an inordinate interest in his wife and small children. He is, among other things, a remarkable pianist. If he had time, he would like to continue his study of astronomy. He is punctiliously polite and very absent-minded.

He cannot be induced to part with an old, greasy checkered cap which he wears in the factory and out. Except for flying, he does as he pleases.

His factory employs hundreds of people, the vast majority of whom are Russians who, like himself, have known the terrors of revolutionary days in the homeland. They have their own little church, and workers and company executives alike attend worship there.

On Dec. 14, the Grand Duchess Kira of Russia, great-granddaughter of Queen Victoria and youngest daughter of Grand Duke Cyril of Russia, inspected the factory.

"I am naturally quite proud," she said "to think that some of my countrymen have built such a wonderful organization."

Russians, employed in the mechanical and woodworking departments, some of whom held high social and military positions in Russia, expressed real enthusiasm and affection upon seeing her.

Today, at forty, Igor Ivan Sikorsky, looking back over the years he spent fighting hard against adversity, has the satisfaction of seeing his dreams come true. But, being an inventor, he has no real satisfaction. His only answer is to visualize greater and more unbelievable things for the future.

Wings sweep upward from the hull for almost a third of the span, then flatten out. Craft is powered with two Rolls Royce steam cooled engines, so mount-