



# Dawn Patrol on the H

**In upstate New York, carefully rebuilt World War I and 1920s-era aircraft take to the skies once more.**





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**Photography by Guy Aceto, Art Director, and Paul Kennedy**

*The Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome's Caudron G.III sports vintage instruments, upper right wing panel, cowling, and a Le Rhone rotary engine. The French-manufactured aircraft was flown by several nations during World War I. This airplane dates to 1914 and still flies in weekend air shows.*



**T**he Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome, nestled in the rolling hills of the picturesque Hudson Valley north of New York City in Rhinebeck, N.Y., was founded in 1959. It boasts some 75 antique aircraft dating from the very early days of flying. From mid-June through mid-October, about 15 of those airplanes take to the air each weekend for an air show that includes a dogfight demonstration and barnstorming display.

James Henry Cole Palen, a longtime aviation enthusiast, came up with the idea for the aerodrome in 1951 after the closing of Roosevelt Field, a civilian airfield on Long Island. In an auction of the field's collection of World War I airplanes, the Smithsonian acquired three and Palen six.



Photos by Paul Kennedy



The aerodrome's aircraft are divided into three distinct eras: the pioneers, typified by the Curtiss "Pusher" (above and left); World War I aircraft, such as the Spad VII; and the postwar airplanes from the 1920s and 1930s.

The museum's reproduction of a 1915 Nieuport 11 (right), built by Gordon and Kay Bainbridge, has an original 80 hp Le Rhone rotary engine and instruments. Known as a "sesquiplane" rather than a biplane because of the small area of the lower wings, the Nieuport 11 inspired German copies developed by both the Siemens-Schuckert and Albatros companies.

This aircraft is finished in the colors of the model flown by Victor Chapman, who, flying with the Escadrille Americaine, became the first American pilot to lose his life in World War I.



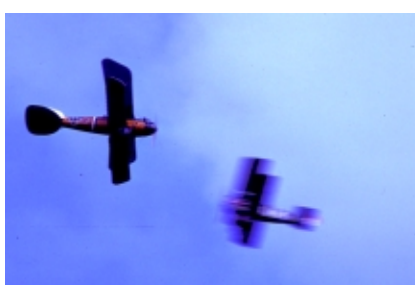
Staff photo by Guy Aceto





*The Luftwaffe, circa 1917, is represented in the weekend dogfights at the aerodrome by re-enactors flying a reproduction Albatros D.Va (above and right). The aircraft was painstakingly created by Palen, Gordon Bainbridge, and Neil Boehme, who measured every inch of an Albatros at the National Air and Space Museum. It made its first flight in October 1975 with an original 120 hp Mercedes engine. Unfortunately, the crankshaft of the antique engine soon broke.*

*Today the aircraft flies—albeit with a newer, more reliable engine—in the colors of the aircraft flown by World War I ace Capt. Eduard Ritter von Schleich, better known as the “Black Knight.”*



*The Sopwith F-1 Camel (far left), flown by British and American pilots, was perhaps the most successful fighter airplane of World War I.*

*At left, the Albatros and the Camel engage in mock combat.*



*With an eye to the 75th anniversary of Charles Lindbergh's historic 1927 New York–Paris flight, Rhinebeck's master craftsman Ken Cassens is building a nearly exact replica of the Spirit of St. Louis. With the cooperation of the National Air and Space Museum, Cassens was allowed the unique opportunity to reach inside the cockpit of the original aircraft to take measurements and photographs of the legendary airplane. At right, aerodrome guests visit Cassens's workshop.*



Photos by Paul Kennedy



*Some of Rhinebeck's most popular machines are from the Lindbergh era. One example: this lovingly restored Waco QCF, owned and flown by aerodrome pilot Dan Taylor. The QCF was one of the top performers of its day, able to clear a 50-foot obstacle with a takeoff roll of only 400 feet. It could land in a 100-foot circle.*



*The aerodrome is open to visitors during the week, but the biggest crowds gather for the Saturday and Sunday air shows. The performances are faithful to the barnstorming tradition, mixing aerobatics, comic elements, and mock combat.*







*Visitors can ride in a New Standard D-25 biplane. The open-cockpit aircraft provides passengers an authentic “wind in the face” experience during 15-minute flights over the Hudson Valley.*

*The 1928 D-25 was designed expressly for barnstorming. It was easy to fly, could be operated out of even the smallest fields with its big, high-lift wings, and featured a rugged, wide-stance landing gear for rough farm fields.*



*Best of all for the barnstorming pilots of the 1920s, it doubled the payload of the “old” Standard with room for four paying passengers instead of two per flight.*

*At left, aerodrome pilot Cassens takes to the air with guests.*



**Antique aircraft arrive in many different ways. The rare Bleriot XI monoplane (right), similar to the one Louis Bleriot flew across the English Channel in 1909, was donated to Palen in 1952 by Bill Champlin of Laconia, N.H. Champlin obtained it from H.H. Coburn, who as a boy had spotted the aeroplane in a junkyard. Apparently, the Bleriot had crashed at an air meet in 1910.**

**When the aircraft reached Rhinebeck it was approximately 25 percent complete. New wings, a stabilizer, and elevators were built. The front third and rear third of the fuselage are original, and it is powered by a 35 hp Anzani Y-type engine.**



Staff photos by Guy Aceto



Photo by Paul Kennedy

**The maximum altitude at which this Bleriot has flown is about 60 feet. It is the oldest flying aircraft in the United States, according to aerodrome officials.**

**The air at the Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome smells faintly of burning castor oil and kerosene, and the quiet of the Hudson Valley sets off the unique sounds of vintage aircraft engines. The people themselves, dressed in period clothing—and some sporting handlebar mustaches—could have stepped out of the pages of a history book.**



Photo by Paul Kennedy



*In 1957, Palen began collecting pieces of a Curtiss “Jenny” JN-4H from a wrecked aircraft. Over the years, more parts were found, including a 180 hp Hispano Suiza Model E engine. In 1969, restoration was completed and the Jenny began flying. It flew until 1998, when it was stripped down for a total restoration. It returned to the sky in 2001. The aerodrome has the only Hispano Suiza-powered Jenny flying in the world today.*

*Some of the most famous—or, in the case of the Fokker D.VII, infamous—aircraft in the world are displayed at the Old Rheinbeck Aerodrome. These include everything from a Davis D1W and DeHavilland DH.82 Tiger Moth to reproductions of the Chanute Glider and the Wright Flyer.*

*The aerodrome also features many vintage cars, trucks, and motorcycles along with about 50 impeccably restored aircraft engines.*



*Palen died in 1993, but the aerodrome lives on as his legacy to lovers of early aviation everywhere.*

*The four exhibit buildings open in mid-May, and the weekend air shows resume in mid-June. ■*