

Teddy's Excellent Adventure

Roosevelt Wasted No Time Being the First Prez to Fly

BY JOHN LOCKWOOD

The very name of **Theodore Roosevelt** brings up an image of a man of limitless energy, always seeking new adventures. In 1910, he added another one to his list when he flew in an airplane.

Roosevelt started life as a sickly child, but he didn't stay that way. He spent his youth training and exercising until his earlier frailty was just a memory. The one exception was his eye-

One of the aviators, Arch Hoxsey, who worked for the Wright brothers and was flying one of their biplanes, met Roosevelt on the field. Hoxsey was a great admirer of Roosevelt and was determined to give him a plane ride. Hoxsey later described their meeting in the Wednesday, October 12th issue of the *St. Louis Republic*.

Hoxsey broke the ice by mentioning that both he and Roosevelt had the same birthday, October 27th. "As soon as I saw his smile, I knew I had him." Roosevelt then expressed envy of Hoxsey's flying, leading to: "Here is your chance to share it with me," followed by a hopeful, "No?," then Hoxsey's "Sure."

As Hoxsey and Roosevelt made their way to the airplane, Hoxsey felt he was "walking on air." But he reminded himself: "Now, Hoxsey, no funny business when you get this fellow up, because if you spill him you can never square yourself with anybody."

At first, the crowd of some 15,000 spectators thought that Roosevelt was merely going to get his picture taken in the plane. But then, people began calling out such things as "Well, I'll be damned, if he isn't going up!"

Roosevelt clambered between the wires and struts and took his seat. The former President was a bit portly, so Hoxsey tied a few blocks of metal on his own side of the craft, to balance the weight.

While waiting for takeoff, Roosevelt may have been a bit apprehensive, with his jaw grimly shut as shown in newspaper photos and in eyewitness accounts. But once air-

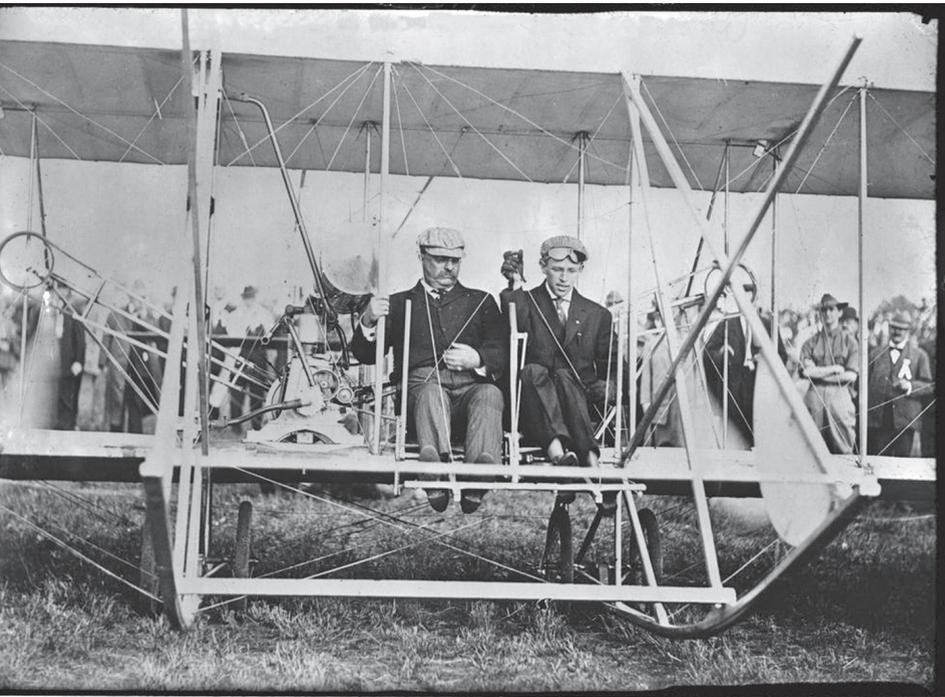
borne, Roosevelt began having the time of his life.

The flight lasted three minutes and 30 seconds, about 100 feet above the ground. Hoxsey was careful to fly only over open areas, in case he had to land suddenly. As for Roosevelt, he was waving at the crowds below, while they in turn cheered themselves hoarse. The band played "We Won't Go Home Till Morning."

However, Hoxsey had to shout to his hero over the aircraft noise, asking Roosevelt to stop the handwaving, which might disrupt one of the wires or other connections. In particular, Hoxsey was worried about a valve cord overhead, which, if pulled even slightly, would shut down the engine.

Then the plane gently landed, and Roosevelt climbed out with an ear-to-ear grin. The two men were briefly separated by the crowd, but Roosevelt called out, "Hoxsey, you're all right." For Hoxsey, "It certainly was the biggest day of my life!"

What did Roosevelt think of it all? "It was bully!" †



Roosevelt, looking a little anxious, prepares himself for his first flight.

sight, but his eyeglasses never held him back.

Roosevelt eventually entered public life, culminating, of course, in the presidency. Although he eventually left office, he can hardly be said to have retired. Among other things, he went on a safari and took a ride in a submarine.

Roosevelt also stayed active in politics, campaigning for the Republican Party. That brought him to St. Louis, Missouri for a one-day visit on Tuesday, October 11th, 1910, to speak on behalf of the party at the local Coliseum. An international air meet had started the day before at the Kinloch Aviation Field, and Roosevelt was determined to see that first. As he expressed it, "We wanted to cram 48 hours of experiences into 24 hours." He would arrive at the field by 3 p.m., and give his speech at 8:30.

Though Roosevelt had only left the White House the previous year, local newspapers called him "Colonel Roosevelt," or the "Colonel," referring to his service in the Spanish-American War. Nowadays, former presidents are still called "President."