

THROUGH THE FORESIGHT OF ED MALONEY, THIS RARE AT-12 FLIES TODAY AS A REMINDER OF AN UNUSUAL AND IMPORTANT PERIOD OF AMERICAN AERONAUTICAL HISTORY

The Last GUARDSMAN

BY MICHAEL O'LEARY
AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY BY DOUG FISHER

“You know, I get asked a certain question all the time and it is, ‘What’s your favorite aircraft?’ My usual answer is that they are all my favorites, and that is very true. Each one of these aircraft has a unique story — a story of survival when so many others did not make it. However, a couple are my real favorites and this is one of them.”

About a year before his untimely death, we had conducted a number of interviews with Ed

Maloney, founder of the Planes of Fame Air Museum. At times during these interviews we would stroll through the POF hangars and talk about the planes Ed had saved over the years. When he made the above comment, we were standing next to the gleaming Seversky/Republic AT-12 Guardsman. Ed’s son John and some of the POF volunteers had just given the rare survivor a good polish to the aluminum skin. This was prior to one of the POF’s annual airshows and the Seversky really gleamed.

So, what exactly is an AT-12 and how did this example come to be on display at POF? It is a story that involves international politics and intrigue taking place on the verge of a war that would encompass the globe.

until the company won a contract for what would become the Air Corps’ P-35 — what some considered America’s first modern fighter.

During 1935, Seversky designed, built, and flew a privately funded aircraft designated SEV-2XP. A two-seater, it was soon damaged in a test flight, dragged back to the factory, and rebuilt as the single-seat SEV-1XP, which would eventually morph into the P-35.

At the time, Seversky was being hounded by creditors and was also making some unwise sales decisions. Top management felt he needed to be replaced but the P-35 order offered a reprieve, but not for long. Knowing there was a big market in Europe, Seversky did some quick modification work and shipped two of his planes to Europe for display — the EP-1 (essentially a P-35) and the 2PA, which was basically an enlarged two-seat P-35 with dive-bombing capabilities and given the working name of Convoy Fighter.

MR. SEVERSKY SELLS WARPLANES

Russian immigrant Maj. Alexander de Seversky was an innovative, talented, and flamboyant character when it came to aircraft design. With the Seversky Aircraft Corporation, the major opened New York offices in 1931 and moved to Farmingdale in 1934. He designed and built a number of aircraft that were somewhat radical for the time period but failed to achieve production orders. His aircraft helped pioneer all-metal construction, enclosed canopies, retractable landing gear, etc. Orders were usually very small and success was not achieved

An expanding Swedish military tested the two planes and liked them — especially since Seversky said they could be delivered in short order. During 1939, the Swedes placed an order for 60 EP-1s (later fully designated EP-1-106 — and in Swedish service J9) and 51 2PAs (B6). The contract was soon upgraded for a further 60 EP-1s with options for more 2PAs along with an agreement for license building the types.

While all this was going on, Seversky was ousted and a new company with the

name Republic emerged. The contract for the aircraft, now carrying the Republic name, called for the delivery of the first EP-1s within 120 days of the contract signing.

President Roosevelt’s new Neutrality Law put the brakes on the aircraft but 60 EP-1s had already been shipped along with two 2PAs.

THE TWO THAT MADE IT ACROSS

At least two of the Swedish B6s were flown in the USA with Swedish markings and they were serials 7201 and 7219. However, they were never delivered to Sweden. The only two that made it across the Atlantic reached Sweden by ship during April 1940 and these machines were assembled by the Central Flying Works at Malmslatt. On 20 August, they entered service with serials 7203 and 7204.

Sweden had planned on receiving 52 B6s built by Seversky/Republic — ordered in two batches of 26 aircraft each. Also, Sweden wanted to build the

The first B6, serial 7203, was assigned to Flotilla Six (F6) of the *Flygvapen* at Karlsborg where it was painted in camouflage and given the individual aircraft code of 16. Three white bands were painted around the rear fuselage but one band was removed a few days later. The aircraft was quickly pressed into training duties in order to give Swedish pilots experience in advanced aircraft with high wing loadings.

There was one problem — there were no instructors with experience on such aircraft but the Swedes made due. Just one-month later, B6 7203 was heavily damaged. On 20 September, pilot G.B.H. Lindstrom and flight cadet A.G. Nystrom had been given permission to fly the B6 but neither had any time in high-performance types. Lindstrom was killed and Nystrom was seriously injured.

At 10:25 am, Lindstrom was making an approach for landing but was not comfortable and decided to go-around. However, he raised the plane’s nose but did not advance the throttle. The Seversky stalled, completed half a turn

of a spin, and then impacted the ground with its nose and left wing.

Lindstrom had made only a few flights in the backseat of the B6 and that cockpit’s flight controls had been disabled for unknown reasons. At the time of the accident, B6 7203 had recorded just 31-hours and 15-minutes of flight time. The *Flygvapen* wrote the aircraft off its books on 22 October.

B6 7204 had also been delivered in a

John Maloney displays the AT-12’s classic wing planform during a flight from Chino. POF President Steve Hinton has also flown the aircraft and comments, “I find the plane to be pretty stable — controls are heavy but engine operation is smooth and the cockpit is comfortable.”

