

**August 27, 2021**

## **Grand Canyon Tidbits by Kim Besom**

### **Grand Canyon Aviation History**

In honor of last week's **National Aviation Day**, some tidbits about Grand Canyon aviation history.

For many, seeing nature's greatest geologic rent in the Earth is irresistible, and because of that, there are several close links between the history of Grand Canyon National Park and the history of aviation. The first overflight of the park came within hours of the park's creation. Famed aviators Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart both flew over and stopped at the Red Butte Airport. The 1956 collision site of two airlines, which had diverted from their intended flight paths to view the Grand Canyon, was designated the first National Historic Landmark for an event that occurred in the air, in part for its importance in subsequently spurring the creation of the Federal Aviation Administration. And overflights have been a resource management concern ever since.

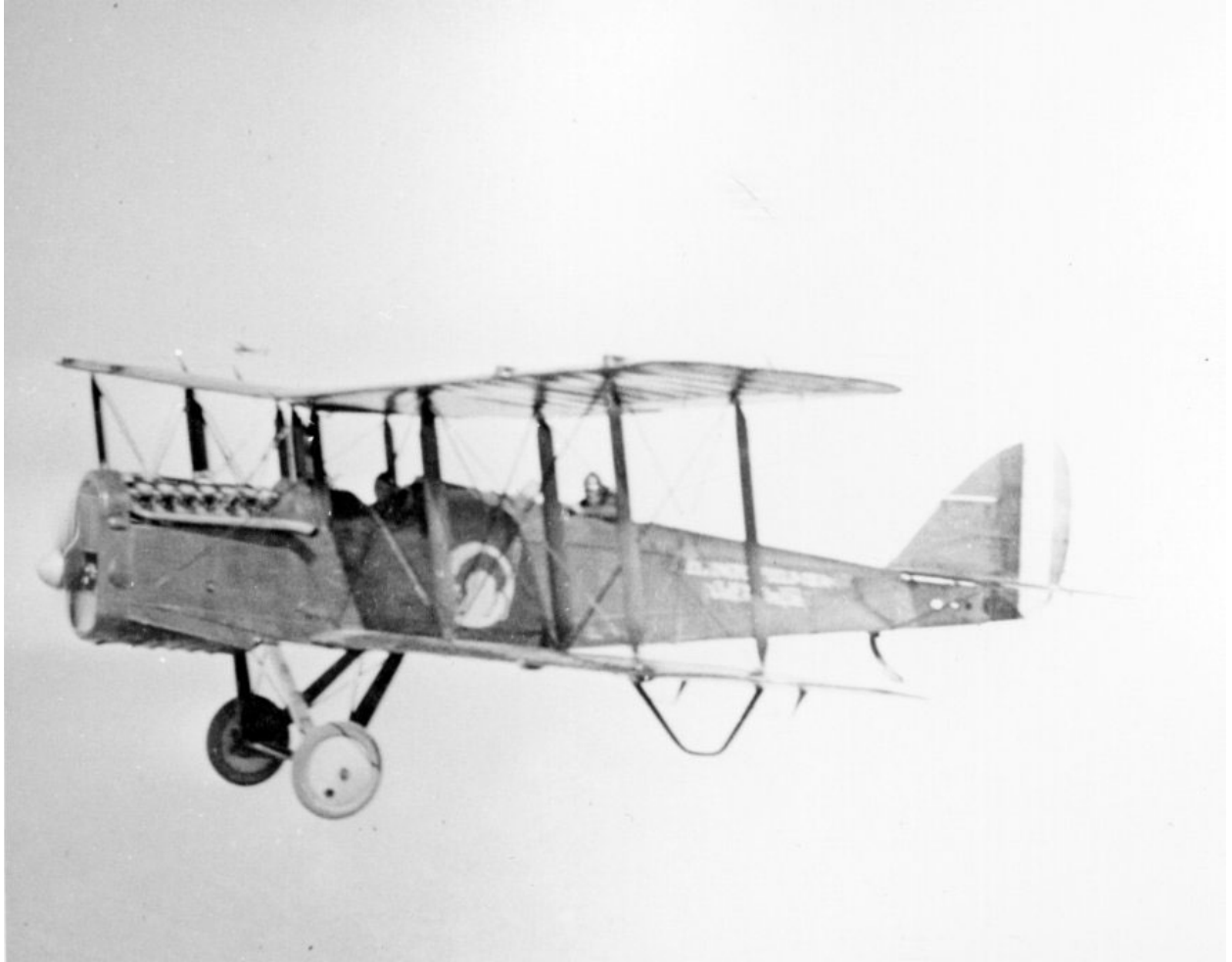
#### **Some aviation firsts at Grand Canyon:**

The first recorded overflights of the Grand Canyon occurred February 25-26, 1919. A newspaper article from the time read, "What was said... to be the first airplane flight over the Grand Canyon of the Colorado was made... by Lieutenants R.O. Searle and E.D. Jones of Houston, Texas. They made the flight in a De Haviland bombing plane and were in the air for two hours. They flew from Kingman to the canyon and returned after following its course for many miles. The flight was made at an altitude of about 14,000 feet."

The following day, another newspaper article reported, "The first 'depth flight' ever made between the walls of the Grand Canyon was successfully completed... by Lieutenant Charles Rugh of Ellington Field, with Lewis Lewyn as passenger... Lieutenant Rugh flew his big De Haviland straight down into the canyon and then flew along its course 2000 feet below the rim. Rough air pockets were encountered but were overcome by the De Haviland's great power... The time of the flight was an hour and 50 minutes."



#5883: Crew of the first flight over Grand Canyon, Lieutenants H. Birkett, R. Searle and E. Jones, February 1919



#5884: First airplane flight over the Grand Canyon, a De Havilland plane in flight, February 1919

And on August 8, 1922, Ellsworth Kolb hired R.V. Thomas, a barnstorming World War I pilot, to fly the first and only airplane to land within the inner canyon, and more importantly, the first to then take off again. Park rangers created a runway near Plateau Point that was 90 feet wide and 400 feet long. Thomas, with Ellsworth along as a passenger and cameraman, landed and took off twice.



Pilot R.V. Thomas flying his plane into the Grand Canyon, August 8, 1922.



#5235: The first airplane to land within the Canyon at Plateau Point. Pilot R.V. Thomas and Fred Harvey mules. August 8, 1922. Fred Harvey photo.

**Enjoy!**