

# Oliver Andre Rosto

A Life Dedicated To Aviation

Rob J.M. Mulder



A Piece of Nordic Aviation History



To Ella Westerås and Alvin & Rosie Grady

1st edition, 2011

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Front cover: Oliver Andre Rosto standing at the engine of the Boeing 307

*Stratocruiser*

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# Introduction

When I attended the ceremony of the induction of Oliver Andre Rosto in May 2009 I was impressed with the status this Norse-American has in the United States of America. He was not known in Norway until Hans Olav Løkken wrote an article about him in the Norwegian aviation press. He put forward the claim that Rosto was the first Norwegian to have flown as a pilot in 1909 in his Rosto Monoplane. This book will try to tell the correct story of his colorful life. Oliver Rosto, called by some the “Clark Gable of Aviation”, is nevertheless a Norse-American to be reckoned with and his work in the field of civil aviation has been significant. Research about him has revealed new facts, but it was not always possible to get some of his stories confirmed. Oliver Rosto was a man, who dedicated his life to aviation. At the age of 87 he made his last flight in a U.S.A.F. trainer, a Lockheed T-33 Shooting Star! It was a suitable end to his flying career.

Hans Olav Løkken has nevertheless managed to put Oliver Rosto on the map and get the Norwegian aviation enthusiasts interested. And we have to thank him for that. Many of Rosto's friends live in the USA so it was obvious that this book had to be written in English. It is a part in the series of books called “*A Piece of Nordic Aviation History*”. The aim of the series is to present themes from Norwegian civil aviation between 1910 and 1945. For Rosto we have made an exception as he lived well beyond 1945.

The main supporter for Hans Olav Løkken and me has been Alvin “Al” Grady, Duluth, Minnesota. He also took the initiative to suggest to the board of the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame, Inc. to have Oliver Andre Rosto inducted. On the September 2, 2008, the board would inform him that his request had been honored and on May 2, 2009, he was officially inducted. I would therefore like to dedicate this book to Alvin Grady, the man who inspired all of us in Norway to have a closer look into the life of this Norse-American. I am proud that we have managed to do this and hope this booklet reflects his life and work in a respectful way. Supporters of my work were also the Norwegian relatives of Oliver Rosto, who backed me up when I offered to write the story: Henning and Sigrid, Jan, Marit and Lene Westerås. This book has also been dedicated to their mother and grandmother, Ella Westerås, daughter of Oliver and Selma.

A special thank you goes to David Ouse, Manager of Reference Services at the Duluth Public Library. He gave access to all of the early Duluth Newspapers, which are on microfilm and even helped to search through the Newspapers. He is a Rosto fan. And Gerald Sandvick, co-author of the book *Minnesota Aviation History 1857-1945*. He began his research of Rosto in the 1980s before the book was published, but could not find any conclusive information. But his findings have been put at the disposal of Alvin Grady and me.

In addition to Alvin Grady many others have helped to compel the history and I would also like to thank these people and institutes for their contribution: First of all we all have to thank Diana Darnaby, who many years ago took the initiative to contact Al Grady and offer him the material about Oliver Rosto. She had received it from her father, Lars Lind, who was a very close friend of Oliver Rosto. She brought me in contact with Glenn Plymate, who knew Rosto from his time in Oakland.

I also came in touch with Walter Cramer, who is the grandson of Mary Rosto and how gave me information about his grandmother. Also Mrs. Arue Beaulieu Szura, who knew Oliver Andre Rosto from his days in Oakland, was able to give us more details about the last years of Rosto's life.

Many others have tried to help. In order to retrieve the date of the issuing of Rosto's first pilot's license, I had to track down many possible sources, but finally John Davis had some contacts within the American FAA, who helped me out. I would like to thank Paul Turk, Roland Herwig and George Pennington for their help. Finally these people have done their best to help me with additional information and or photographs and I appreciate their help: Alain Bourret, Mike Buescher, Jon Carr Farrelly, Michele Guess, Dan Hagedorn, Stig Jarlevik, Steve Kallan, Bill Matthews, Martina Mulder, Lars Op-land, Robert Parmeter, Christos G. Psarras, Sven Scheiderbauer (thank you for your honest opinion), Jim Schubert, Colin Smith, William T. Larkins, Barry Towey, the U.S. Embassy in Oslo and other members of the Wings of Peace- and Air Britain Forum.

I added footnotes to the chapters as there are, especially in the chapter about his flying years, many facts that are unclear and I wanted to back it up with where I got the facts from. The bibliography will include the books, newspapers, magazines and websites that have been used. I found many photographs, but many were as a rule of lower quality. I nevertheless found the pictures of such importance that I hope that the reader will forgive the poor quality of these. I believe the contribution of these photos go beyond their quality.

In 1881, this year 130 years ago, Oliver Andre Rosto was born and thus this is a good occasion to have a closer look at his life, that he dedicated to aviation. And to you the reader I can only say, enjoy reading this book.

*Rob J.M. Mulder*  
Spikkestad, September 2011



*Roald Amundsen in Duluth. After his death in 1928 this photograph was sent to Oliver Rosta in memory of Roald Amundsen. (Via Alvin Grady)*

simply called “The South Pole” and was illustrated by slides and motion pictures<sup>31</sup>. The afternoon lecture was in Norwegian, while the evening lecture was in English.<sup>32</sup> During this visit Rosta met Amundsen and they became friends. In 1918 Amundsen returned to Duluth again to address a large audience on the on-going battle of First World War and appealing to the American people to stand behind the President to the last ditch and work with 100% efficiency to end the war. Although they probably never met again, Rosta and Amundsen remained friends. After Amundsen’s death Rosta received a photograph of Amundsen from Captain Oscar L. Thomsen with a special greeting<sup>33</sup>.

### **Speed! Speed! Speed!**

Speed was what Rosta liked, and not just high speed on the road or in the air, but also on the ice during winter time. In 1913 he took off from the ice in his Rosta Monoplane and just two years later would be again on the ice of Lake Superior with his high speed Overland automobile. Mr. E. J. Filiatrault (see photograph to the right), Rosta’s boss at the Mutual Automobile Co, loved cars and had the brilliant idea to organize races on the ice of Lake Superior. The ice was thick enough to carry the weight of thousands of people and many automobiles. Filiatrault figured that Duluth could become an “Indianapolis Speedway” on the ice. The course on the ice had a length of four miles and sand was spread to aid in traction and to make



greater speeds possible. Duluth had an avenue for winter sports not open to many of the larger cities in the United States. Automobile races on ice were certain to tickle the fancy of the fans and become the King of winter sports. Although some ice races were organized in 1915, it would not achieve this status. Rosto would of course enter, but as a car driver and not flying his plane.

The first recorded ice race that Rosto entered was held in conjunction with the "Twin Ports Auto Show". The auto show was held at the Duluth Auditorium and opened its doors on Monday, February 22, 1915 at 3.00 p.m. There were twenty-eight cars on exhibition as well as several stripped auto chassis. Hundreds attended the opening show. The grand opening was conducted by Duluth Mayor, Mr. William I. Prince. The exhibits were not so numerous as to pack the big hall, allowing ample space for spectators to move freely and to get a good view of every car at every angle. Cars on show included makes like Overland Motors, Studebaker Corporation, Metz Company, Apperson, Packard Motor Car Co, Buick Motor Co, Marmon Motor Car Co, Reo Motor Car Co, Chalmers Motor Car Co, Ford Motor Co, Maxwell Motor Co and Page Motor Co.

A car race on the ice would also occur on February 22 and again on February 28. Official records of the two races have been found. These races were quite different from each other, because of very different weather conditions. The race on February 22 was marked by standing water on the ice, while the race on February 28 had perfect cold, crisp and clear conditions. The race of "the iron monsters" on February 22, as the newspapers wrote, was not well suited for racing. Some 2,500 spectators were on the ice to see that event. The "finish line" was about a half-mile from the shore. The temperature was so high that *"...the ice started to melt and threatened to plunge the thousands of romping, yelling human beings into its icy depths, but it resulted in nothing more than the wetting of many feet"*. As a result, many feet were wetted, but most of them did not care. They crowded about the long speedway and shouted in unison at the racing motor cars. The Duluth News Tribune wrote of the course: *"A four-mile course was laid out several days ago that would have made folks down at Indianapolis, who are always crowing about how wonderful is their Hoosier speedway, begin to see green-eyed monsters"*. Alex Cosgrove, driving a Pattison's Oldsmobile, and Ray Buchanan, driving a National, were the only contestants in the 16-mile race for big cars. Buchanan had trouble with his car and was unable to finish. Cosgrove's time was 11 minutes 40 seconds for twice around the big oval. Rosto driving an Overland, and Cliff Oppel, in a Napier, started in the preliminary heat of the small car event. Rosto went around the track in a time of 4 minutes and 50 seconds. When it was all over – and because of the slush it was over much too soon to please the onlookers – the wade back to shore took the creases out of many pairs of trousers.

The next week saw a much larger crowd of 10,000 coming to the races. As already mentioned, the ice conditions were ideal for these speed contests and the crowd was enthusiastic to see "the iron machines" spin around the thrilling turns. That last Sunday in February saw a variety of races. Around 2.00 p.m. the throngs of people

addition he worked as an auto mechanic and dealer for the Mutual Auto Company in Duluth. He constructed his monoplane outside working hours in a building called "The Auditorium", at the corner of 1<sup>st</sup> Street and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue East. This centrally located building was the property of The L. Hammel Company and was a place for small and big meetings. It had a size of 140x80 feet and was "*well adapted for conventions, mass meetings, balls, assemblies, or any occasion for the gathering of large number of people*"<sup>16</sup>. It is certain that Rosto was working on plans for an airplane during the period 1907-1911. But the construction was possibly not started until 1911. In addition, "The Auditorium" housed a garage on the ground floor, which might be where he borrowed tools<sup>17</sup>. The building is no longer there, and the site now houses parking facilities. At the end of March 1912 Rosto's monoplane was ready and he was merely waiting for a new 45hp Curtiss engine and Curtiss propeller to arrive from New York. The partly finished monoplane had been seen by well-known aviator James "Jimmy" Ward during the fall of 1912 and Ward was very enthusiastic about it. So enthusiastic, that Ward offered to buy the airplane with a good profit for Rosto. But Rosto refused and said he wanted to fly the monoplane himself.<sup>18</sup>

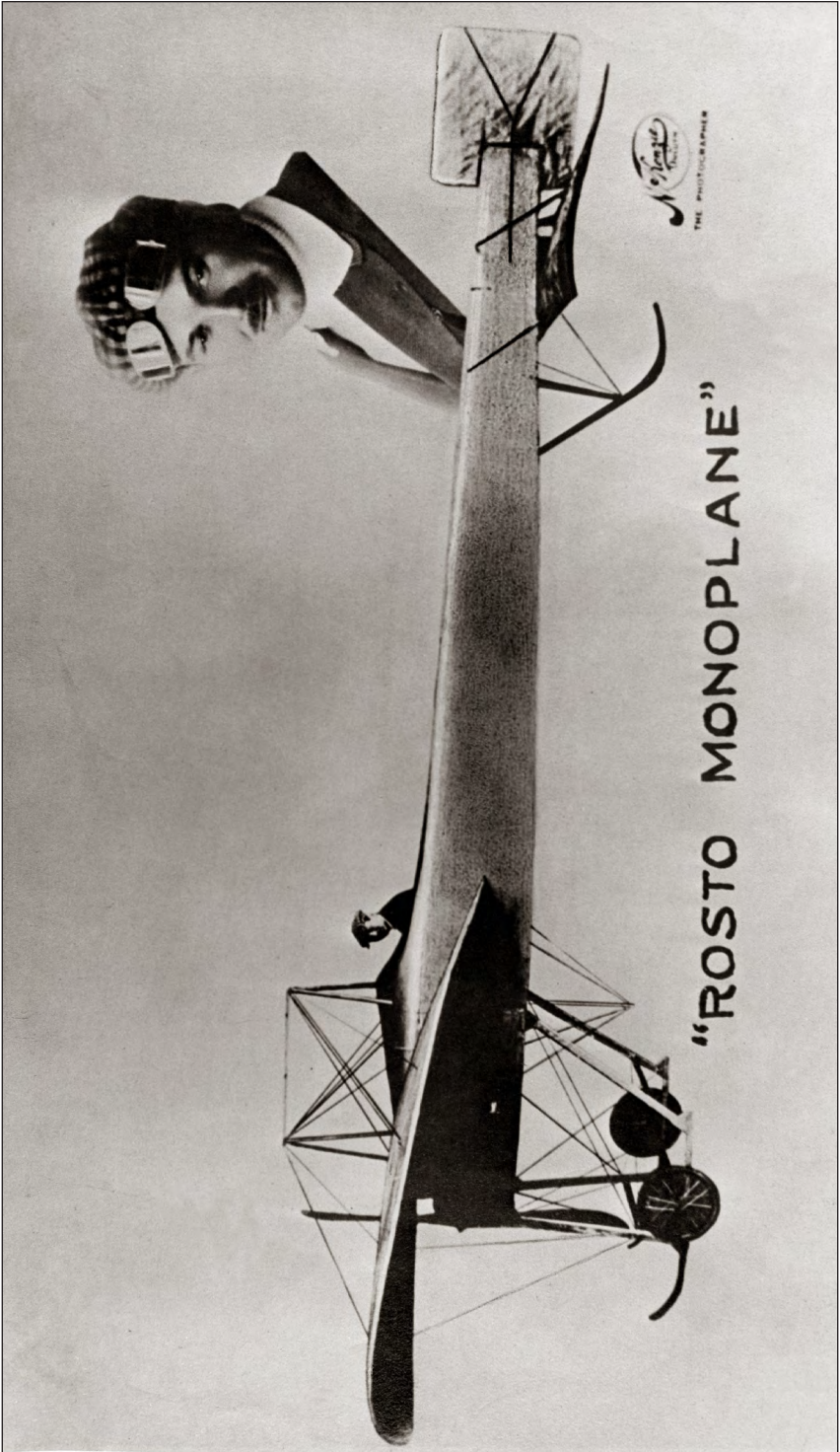
It was reported that the monoplane had been at "The Auditorium" for some time, but as soon as the weather moderated it would be taken down to the harbor for its first flight. It is not known why the engine was not mounted that winter. Rosto had uttered to the newspaper that the engine "*...has already been shipped by freight from New York. It is expected within a few days*".<sup>19</sup> The engine probably did arrive, but the mounting would take time and might even require modifications of the airframe. Another factor may well have been the melting of the snow and ice, that would make a save take-off impossible. Regardless, no flights were made in 1912 and the engine was possibly returned.

Another spring, summer and autumn passed without any flying activities for Rosto in Duluth: Others made a flight, among them John Geistman in a Curtiss Pusher from the Wade Stadium at Duluth<sup>20</sup> and James "Jimmy" Ward on August 3 and 4 from Athletic Park, where more than 6,500 people saw him fly. *The Duluth News Tribune* reported in an article "*...His flights both days were marked by the ease and evident sureness with which they were accomplished. Everything demonstrated that Mr. Ward is not only a masterly aviator, but that his machine, "Shooting Star" is of the best type*".

But new ice on Lake Superior in the winter of 1912-13 was certain to come and offered new opportunities for Rosto. Meanwhile, Rosto had ordered a new type of engine from France: a 35hp Anzani V with two-bladed propeller (see below). During its day, this was a modern engine and of the same horsepower as the Blériot XI used back in France. Rosto's first flight now seemed eminent.

## **The Airplane**

Rosto's monoplane was in one word beautiful and it is a pity not more flying had



“ROSTO MONOPLANE”

M. J. J.  
THE PHOTOGRAPHY

and Ella waited for him to return. In September 1945 he returned and they got married. They built a house in Kalvåsen in 1954 and had a grocery store until 1966. Ella started to work for at the school office in Ballangen, where she worked until her retirement. Lundberg died of heart failure. Ella moved to Ballangen and is presently (August 2011) living at a nursing home at Ballangen. Before her health started to fail, she was very active in the pensioners' association making small dolls. She organized courses as well. She traveled a lot and organized numerous tours for the pensioners' association.

After the death of her parents she started to look for Oliver. She only had his first name on a piece of paper. She took it to the Salvation Army and asked for help. They found an article in a local historian book about a boy, who had moved to the USA and became a big guy there. She found out his name, where he lived, and the name of Evelyn Cramer came up, but she could not get hold of them until the internet made a better search possible. Assisted by her granddaughter Lene Westerås, they took contact with the 18-20 Evelyn Cramers they found in the U.S. telephone directories and asked them if they knew Oliver Rosto. They managed to find the correct Evelyn Heiserman Cramer and visited her in 1998. Ella also came in contact with Oliver's family in Trøndelag and visited them on several occasions.

### **Back to aviation**

But it seems that Rosto got himself a new job by 1923. In that year he returned to aviation again and took a position at the Ericson Aircraft Ltd. So, how did this company come into being and what kind of activities did the company exploit? Between January and May 1918 Frithiof "Fritz" G. Ericson made a tour through the Allied countries in Europe on behalf of the American government and investigated large airfields and airplane manufacturing facilities. After this tour he returned to Canada, where Ericson resumed his old position. He now worked on the construction of a flying boat for the U.S. Navy. But his desire was to transfer back to American aviation circles. In October 1918 he left Curtiss and took a month off. By the time he got back the First World War had been ended with the signing of the Armistice. He immediately traveled back to Toronto, met with the Canadian Government and started negotiations for the huge amounts of material which had remained unused at the factory. Ericson said he wanted to take over the whole stock and this surprised the authorities. He returned to the United States to find funds, which he located in Baltimore. He returned to the Canadian government and said that he wanted to purchase up to 500 airplanes and spare parts. Around Christmas 1918, he was ready to sign the agreement, when suddenly his financier from Baltimore died. Now without funds it was not possible to sign the agreement. But help came from a friend in New York, who said he wanted to buy forty airplanes. Ericson traveled from Baltimore to New York, met his friend and soon a new consortium had been put together. On January 23, 1919, Ericson purchased the British Air Corp's material

in Canada amounting to several hundred airplanes, spare parts, engines etc at a price of \$ 9,000,000.<sup>62</sup> The airplanes he bought were all of the type Curtiss JN-4 *Canuck*. The *Canuck* was basically a redesigned Curtiss JN-4 *Jenny*. This redesigning had been done by Ericson. They were given the name *Canuck* to distinguish them from the American built *Jennys*.<sup>63</sup> The number of airplane purchased might initially have been 500, but this figure seems to be far too high. Ericson kept at least 53 at Camp Borden, where he had set up a company named Ericson Aircraft Ltd. In 1919 numerous JN-4 *Canucks* purchased in Canada were transferred to the USA and put up for sale. But also in Canada, airplane were sold and used by the Canadian barnstormers.<sup>64</sup>

Ericson Aircraft Ltd. produced a three-seat version of the JN-4 *Canuck*. This airplane was known as the *Ericson Special Three* and was first offered for sale in the summer of 1919. After he managed to sell most of his airplane, he started to produce them as well.<sup>65</sup> In Baltimore he had a small plant and Ericson asked Rosto to become the plant manager. Rosto agreed and in 1923 he moved to Maryland and settled in Baltimore. His main job was inspector of airframes, engines and other raw material. In addition he did some test flying for the company and was involved in the improvements of the Curtiss JN-4 *Canuck*. In 1929 Ericson closed down his business. But already the year before Rosto decided to change jobs.

During his stay in Baltimore Rosto met the woman that would remain at his side for the rest of his life: Mary Garecht. Mary was the daughter of German immigrant Jacob Garecht (born in Germany around 1860-61) and Annie H. Garecht (born

*Oliver and Mary were married in Wichita on November 3, 1928. The ceremony was performed by Pastor L. H. Deffner of the Immanuel Lutheran Church. (Via author)*





Civil Aeronautics Administration  
Certificate of Merit

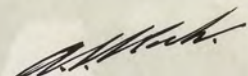
Awarded to

Oliver Andre Rostu

in recognition of his twenty five years of faithful service to the United  
States Government, and his many contributions to civil aviation.

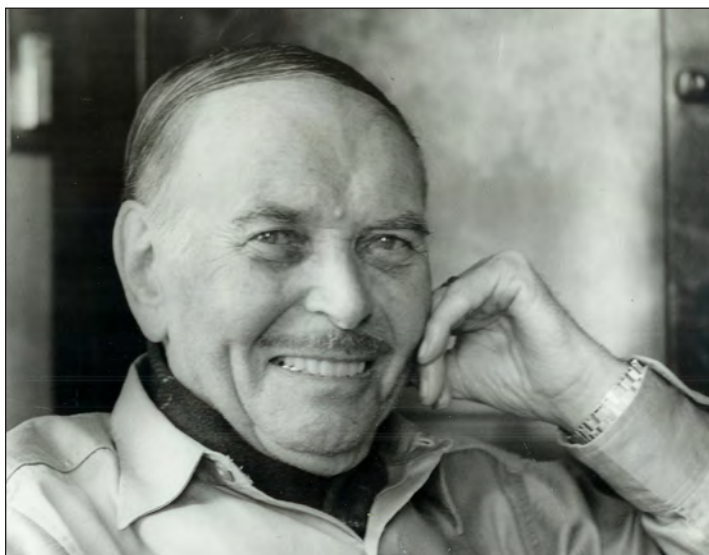
Washington, D. C.

March 3, 1952



Administrator, International Region

*When Oliver Rostu retired he was awarded the Certificate of Merit in recognition of his twenty five years of faithful service. (Via Alvin Grady)*



*A charming man  
in Norway in  
1952. (Via Alvin  
Grady)*

*at 70... At a celebration in the office of the Administrator of the International Region recently old timers gathered and paid Rosto honor. There was much remembering of the old days, but the guest of honor topped all stories with the account of his trip to France where he saw the Bleriot monoplane in flight. Returning home, he decided he could build such a plane too...*<sup>13</sup>

On March 3, 1952, he was awarded the Certificate of Merit from the Civil Aeronautics Administration in recognition of his twenty five years of faithful service to the United States Government, and his many contributions to civil aviation. For Rosto this was a proud moment during his retirement party in Washington.

The couple continued on to Oakland and found their new home at a house on 337 Lenox Avenue. They rented one of the floors. The house was built in 1910 and counted eight bedrooms and two baths. The Rostos occupied one of the floors. Soon they would move to 491 Staten Avenue, just a few hundred yards from Lenox Avenue, where they would live until Oliver's death in 1972. But he was far from ready to quit working...

### **Working for Transocean Air Lines**



In 1907, Orvis Marcus Nelson, son of Marcus and Mamie Nelson, was born in Tamarack, Minnesota. His father was born in Grimstad, Norway, but immigrated with his parents to

the USA at an early age. They settled in Tamarack and Marcus became storekeeper. Orvis learned to work hard while helping out his father in the store. He became interested in aviation after Charles Lindbergh's solo flight across the Atlantic to Paris. The U.S. Army Air Corps was the first stop in his flying career and he graduated from Chanute Field, Illinois. Later he did some aerial photography in rented Waco's and old Travel Airs. During the Depression he returned to the U.S. Army Air Corps and graduated from training at both Kelly Field and Randolph Field. The military was not his business, and in 1935 he decided to resign and start work for United Air Lines (UAL). He worked for UAL throughout the Second World War flying for the Air Transport Command under a UAL contract. In 1944 he and many other pilots moved to Minnesota-based Northwest Airlines. During his time there he flew the company's Douglas C-54 Skymasters (militarized DC-4s) from San Francisco to the islands of the South Pacific. During a stop-over in Okinawa (Japan), Orvis came to talk with Sid Nelson, Harry Huking and Sherwood Nichols. They saw a potential in Japan and reasoned that it would take a while before the Japanese would be allowed to have an airline again. It could be a good idea to set up a Japanese airline themselves. The airline would have the name Orvis Nelson Air Transport Company. He made contact with United management. They were not interested, but United's "Pat" Patterson wrote a letter of introduction to General Douglas MacArthur, the commander in charge of the reconstruction of Japan. Unfortunately, the general



*Plaque from the Early Birds of Aviation, Inc. given to Oliver Andre Rosto on December 15, 1961. (Via Alvin Grady)*

*From left to right: Harry Christofferson, Anthony Stadlman, Stanley Hiller and the two who received their plaque: Oliver Andre Rosto and Hillery Beachey. (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)*



fly in a circle with an airplane. He took his test flight for F. A. I. Airplane Pilot's Certificate #89, on January 10, 1912, at St. Louis, Mo., and was issued his license one week later, on January 17, 1912. He powered his new tractor biplane, sporting raked rear wings, with a 6-cylinder Kirkham motor. Several years after suffering a stroke, he died in a California State Hospital, on July 22, 1964.<sup>6</sup>

December 11, 1964 – Held at the *Hilton Hotel*, San Francisco;

December 3, 1965 – Held at *Goodman's*, 10 Jack London Square, Oakland;

December 19, 1969 – Held at *Fort Mason Officers Club*, Building 1, Bay & Franklin Street, San Francisco;

December 17, 1970 – Held at the *Red Knight Restaurant*, San Francisco.

There is no record of the 1971-meeting and Rosto likely did not participate. In the between years, Rosto did not participate when the meeting was held at a place other than in the San Francisco area. Rosto simply could not afford to.

Many well known Early Birds attended these events, among them men like Robert G. Fowler, Cleve T. Shaffer, Harry P. Christofferson, Dana C. DeHart (one of U.S.A.'s first civilian airmail pilots, 1886 – 1975), Stanley Hiller and Hillery Beachey.

## The OX5 Aviation Pioneers

The OX5 Aviation Pioneers were organized in 1955 at Latrobe, Pennsylvania for this purpose: "*To compile and record in detail the historical and educational history of the development of air transportation. To perpetuate the memory of pioneer airmen and their great sacrifices, accomplishments and contributions to the development of civil aviation and to do honor to all pioneers in aviation, especially those associated with the OX5 engine.*" Rosto was a qualified member, having soloed, flown, owned or actively and directly participated in the design, construction, repair or operation of OX5 powered airplanes prior to December 31, 1940. Oliver Rosto became a member quite late in his life, probably in the period of 1967-68. At that time Arthur Goebel was president and Rosto's certificate was signed by Goebel and club secretary Clifford Ball.<sup>7</sup> It must be noted that Rosto's close friend Lars Lind was also a member of the club.

## Silver Wings



Silver Wings' originally known as Angel Flight, had a specific objective of supporting the mission of the Arnold Air Society. Silver Wings is committed to developing strong civilian leaders with an understanding of aerospace power. As specified in the Silver Wings National Constitution, Silver Wings (SW) is a national, co-ed, professional organization dedicated to creating proactive, knowledgeable, and effective civic leaders through community service and education about national defense.<sup>8</sup>

## Oliver Rosto Called by Death

Looking back on the life of Oliver Rosto, he had a fantastic journey with many highlights and exciting events. But every life on this earth has an end and for Oliver Rosto this was no exception. At the age of 87 he had flown as a passenger in a Lockheed T-33 Shooting Star jet of the U.S. Air Force. In March 1972, Oliver Rosto had made his final flight and on April 2, suffered a stroke and was taken by ambulance from his home at 491 Staten Avenue to Peralta Hospital at 450 30th Street. A week later, on Monday, April 10, 1972, at 11.05 a.m., Oliver Andre Rosto passed away in peace.

After his death he was taken to the Albert Brown Mortuary, where he was cremated at the Mountain View Crematory (3476 Piedmont Avenue), nestled in the foothills of Oakland and Piedmont.<sup>12</sup> An old flying friend, retired State Supreme Court Justice B. Rey Schauer, delivered the eulogy at a service on April 13, 1972, at 2.00 p.m. When Mrs. Arue Beaulieu Szura heard about his death she felt sad beyond words when notified: *“A private funeral was held for his family, and later a memorial for friends was held at a mortuary in Oakland. Vases of flowers and easels holding photographs of Oliver at various stages in his life stood where a casket normally would be, and a few of his comrades gave short eulogies sprinkled with humor and memories of Oliver. I think his memorial was exactly as he would have wanted it to be. I could feel his presence in the room and my heart felt a little bit lighter when I left the mortuary*

***The last flight of Oliver Rosto:*** His ashes were taken up by his friends Lars Lind and Glenn Plymate and scattered across the San Francisco Bay. The aircraft was a Cessna 195, N195K. (Glenn Plymate)



*for I knew that he had lived a wonderful life and was loved by people all over the world, including me. Adieu, Oliver!*” After the cremation, his ashes were taken by his dear friends Lars Lind and Glenn Plymate. They took Oliver’s ashes with them in Glenn’s Cessna 195 (N195K) and took it up to the San Francisco Bay where they spread his ashes at sea.<sup>13</sup> Rosto had made his last and definitive flight.

As to what Mary did following Rosto’s death, she remained at least until 1975 in Oakland before moving back to Lancaster, PA to be close to her daughter Evelyn. There is a photograph of her, dating from 1975 and as far as can be confirmed, she still lived at 491 Staten Ave, Oakland, California.<sup>14</sup> Her last years were spent near her family. She passed away Evelyn’s house in Landisville, Lancaster County, PA<sup>15</sup> in January 1980<sup>16</sup>.

I would like to end the book with the well written text from an obituary written by Camille Ronneberg of The Norwegian Club, San Francisco. She wrote about Oliver Rosto: *“The men of Norway have long been associated with ships, therefore it is interesting to note that one of America’s leaders of early-day aviation was a Norwegian...”* and *“...so ended the career of a courageous Norseman who looked to the skies, rather than the sea”*.<sup>17</sup>

## **Induction Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame**

On January 2009 an invitation arrived at my inbox from Alvin Grady of Hermantown, Minnesota to attend the Twentieth Annual Induction Ceremony of the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame, an annual ceremony taking place in Bloomington, Minnesota. It was to take place on Saturday, May 2, 2009. Also invited were the family Westerås and Norwegian story teller Hans Olav Løkken. The reason for the invitation was that the Norwegian-American aviator Oliver Andre Rosto was to be inducted.

During my research on Rosto I came in contact with the family Westerås, who were the Norwegian descendants of Oliver Andre Rosto. Five persons (Henning, Sigrid, Jan, Marit and Lene) from this family came together in Bloomington along with Hans Olav Løkken and myself. The family would accept the induction on behalf of Oliver Andre Rosto. In addition, Alvin Grady invited us to come to Duluth to see the places where Rosto lived and worked, and where he took off on his first flight. The day before the ceremony we drove from Minneapolis north to Duluth. The landscape looked much the same as Østfold in Norway. Thousands of birch trees were visible along the way. We could well imagine that so many Norwegians settled in this state. We drove a Ford E350 van that Hans Olav had rented. If we drove faster than 65 mph, it was difficult to keep control of the van. Along the way we saw many place names that reminded us of Scandinavia: Askov, Mora, Bannevig Junction, Tofte, Esko, etc. After a two plus hour trip, we arrived at the hills of Duluth and ended at the edge of a very quiet Lake Superior. We were told that it could be really bad here when the wind whipped up off the lake. We met our hosts Alvin



*Above: From left to right: Lt Col Benjamin C. Murph; Col Gabriel P. Bartholomew; Cal Ferris, Glenn Hall, Oliver Rosto and John Maggi. Cal Ferris was President of the San Francisco Chapter of the Air Force Association and was host to the two Air Force officers from Nellis AFB for a briefing on the F-111. (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)  
Below: Rosto standing close to the engine of TWA's Boeing 307 Stratoliner. (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)*





*Autographed photo from the famous aviator Franklin Rose of Varney Speed Lines, dedicated to Oliver Rosto. (Oliver Rosto via Alvin Grady)*





## Oliver Andre Rosto

### A Life Dedicated To Aviation

This is the fantastic story of the life of a Norse-American aviator. He was born in Hemne (Norway) in 1881 and immigrated to the USA (Duluth, Minnesota) in 1902, where he started to work as a mechanic in a world dominated by a new invention: the automobile. But he soon got interested in engines and was eager to construct his own aircraft to become one of a new breed: an aviator. He managed in 1913 to fly his own designed and built monoplane, the Rosto Monoplane, off the ice of Lake Superior in Duluth and from there on his life was dedicated to aviation. He gave up his job as automobile mechanic and moved to New York, where he started to work for Curtiss and the U.S. Navy as an aircraft and engine inspector. During the 1920s he was plant manager of Ericson Aircraft Ltd in Baltimore, before he began his twenty-five-year career in the Civil Aeronautic Authority in 1928. At the age of 71 he was still not interested in giving up aviation and started to work for the Aircraft Engineering & Maintenance Company – AEMCO, a subsidiary of the famous Transocean Air Lines. This company was owned by Orvis Nelson, a man with Norwegian roots as well and also coming from Minnesota.

There existed many myths around Rosto's life and the author has managed to check them all. The story here has been presented in an easy to read way without losing an eye for details. It is also a look into the development of aircraft inspection as it developed between 1928 and 1952. He made his last flight in a jet trainer at the age of 87! Rosto died in 1972 at the age of 90. He certainly had a life dedicated to aviation.

Rob J.M. Mulder, the author, has published five aviation books and this is the fourth in the series called "A Piece of Nordic Aviation History".



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