



**City of San Bernardino
Historical and Pioneer Society
P.O. Box 875, San Bernardino, CA 92402**

LIBRARY NEWS August 2008

By Richard D. Thompson, Librarian

I am taking the summer off, but presented here for your enjoyment is a well-researched and nicely written local history submitted by board member Dick Molony.

LEE MILES: SAN BERNARDINO'S RESIDENT PILOT

By
Dick Molony

**The pictures and other material supplied by Minette Marcelli
and John Underwood were of great help in writing this article**



Minette Marcelli photo

Leland Shaw Miles

Had he been living today Leland Shaw Miles might have been an astronaut, or at the least have entered a profession where he could test his physical, mental, and sensory skills. Having been born in 1903, he pushed those same characteristics to their limits using the tools of the time, “homemade” airplanes.

Lee was born on May 28, 1903, prophetically, the same year the Wright Brothers made their first powered flight at Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina. He was the seventh of eight children born to Frederick Earl Miles and Julia Helena (Perrine) Miles. His parents farmed in Colorado’s San Luis Valley where they had homesteaded. They later moved to Rocky Ford, Colorado, where Lee was born. In 1906 the family moved to California; first to San Diego, and then in 1909 to San Bernardino. When Frederick died in 1933, his obituary described him as “... a retired pattern and cabinet maker and contractor.”

Lee attended the San Bernardino City schools, but there is a question about his high school graduation. San Bernardino High School yearbooks don’t show him as a member of any senior class. Apparently an interest in flying caused him to take the easiest route to an aviation career. In 1920, lying about his age, he enlisted in the Army Air Service in San Francisco.



Minette Marcelli photo

Miles in uniform, home on leave

His flight training was done at March Field, California. Some say he also was stationed at Kelly Field, Texas. The Army was probably the best place to learn to fly, but peacetime military aviation, involved as it is with drill and training, wasn’t the most attractive place for a man of Lee’s temperament. Although he continued to be referred to as Lieutenant Miles, he left the service in 1921.

Not only did he win his wings, he also won the hand of a young lady from Riverside, LaVonne Chamberlin Errington. Her parents weren't too thrilled with the idea, but apparently love won out. The couple was married in Oakland, California on June 14, 1923. For awhile Lee worked for his father-in-law running a service station. However his habit of closing the station to go flying soon brought that occupation to an end. But he still needed an income, for in 1924 Lee and LaVonne's family grew with the addition of LaVonne Corinne born at Sequoia Hospital in San Bernardino.

Possibly this was the time Lee started flying out of a field near the corner of Highland and Mt. Vernon Avenues in San Bernardino. Leon Atwood, who Lee taught to fly, and who later became Lee's backer and partner in his racing adventures, described Miles' operation, "At this time Lee had a few Jennies and a Waco Ten, taught a few students, did some charter flying, some barnstorming and weekend passenger flying." (*SB Sun*, Jan. 7, 1968)

A story is told that Will Rogers, needing to fly to Denver, contacted Lee to fly him. This may have been the start of his Hollywood work. He flew in several films, most notably, *Lilac Time* starring Colleen Moore filmed in 1928. He finally became the personal pilot for another movie star, Ann Harding, and her husband, Harry Bannister.



John Underwood photo

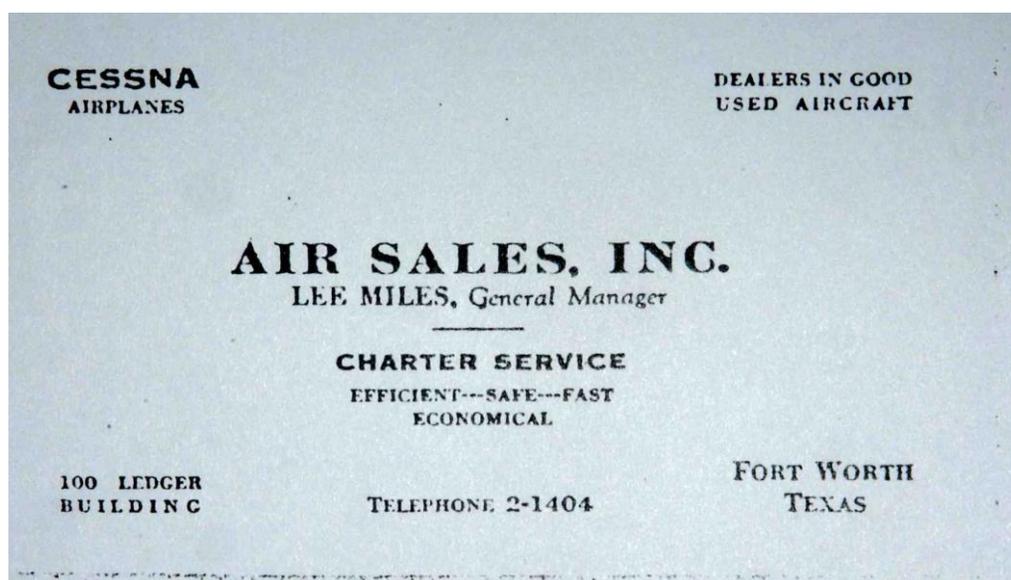
Harry Bannister, Ann Harding (Mrs. Bannister) & Miles in front of their Stinson monoplane

It is difficult to find an area of aviation that Lee Miles wasn't involved in. Beside the already mentioned flight instructor, charter operations, and motion picture work, he also was an airport manager, airline pilot, air show producer, factory sales representative, aviation author, and of course air racer builder and pilot.

Many of these activities ran concurrently, and to separate them into various time periods is difficult, but they included managing first the Shandin Hills airport in San Bernardino and later the Tri-City facilities in Colton.

At one time or another he represented several aircraft manufacturers. Among them were: Cessna, Bellanca, Stinson, and Spartan. *The San Bernardino Sun* reported that: "Leland Miles, formerly of San

Bernardino, and now sales manager for the Stinson Aircraft corporation at Santa Monica will make the...flight in a new six-place Stinson-Detroit monoplaner which has been purchased in Los Angeles.”



He also flew for Western Air Express which later, after several name changes and mergers, became Western Airlines, and was ultimately absorbed by Delta Airlines. Western Air Express received one of the earliest air mail contracts. Lee flew the route between Los Angeles and San Francisco.

If it could be said there was one, Lee Miles was San Bernardino’s “Resident Pilot.” Innumerable people remark even today that: “Lee Miles taught me to fly.” “I had my first airplane ride with Lee Miles.” “We would go out to the airport Sundays and watch Lee Miles fly.” There is even a map that has a spot labeled, “Lee Miles flew his WW I Jenny out of this airport.”

The activity that endeared him most may have been the air shows he either produced or participated in. *The San Bernardino Sun* reported January 21, 1935:

A throng of several thousand attended the air meet yesterday at Shandin Hills airport and were rewarded by thrills aplenty, in the shape of races, parachute jumps and three separate stunt flights by Lieut. Leland S. Miles of San Bernardino, nationally known racing and stunt pilot. Flying a trim Waco plane, Miles, holder of several worlds’ speed records, went through his extensive repertoire of aerobatics, which included loops from inverted positions, upside down flying and any number of other maneuvers.

It was probably the largest crowd to view any similar event here in years. The airport was lined with hundreds of cars and throngs lined the field.

That “similar” event might have been the Citrus Belt Air Meet held sometime in the late 1920s. Again Miles was the star in the local paper:

Lieutenant Miles’ night flying will be one of the outstanding events at the air program which will be crowded with thrills.... Perhaps the most spectacular stunt on Miles’ program will be a sham air battle, in which he will ignite fireworks and then go through the maneuvers of army pilots, dodging powerful searchlights which will be thrown on his plane—if possible—by operators below.

This last contest with the searchlight operators must have had its roots in a bet between Miles and Albert D. Stetson, resident manager of the West Coast Theater in San Bernardino. In 1926, Stetson had praised the searchlight operated by the theater; the power of its beams, and the speed at which it could be operated. According to the *SB Sun*, "Miles, in effect, said the searchlight was the bunk and would prove it by some night flying if Stetson would take his bet." Miles said he would fly over the corner of Highland and Mt. Vernon avenues at 8 o'clock. After the searchlight picked him up he would try to escape the beam while the operator tried to keep him covered.

Inclement weather interfered with this attempt, and a series of winter storms caused a delay from December 6, until the 14th. *The Sun* reported:

San Bernardinans last night were entertained for half an hour by the unique game of hide and seek staged in the air between the searchlight operator of the West Coast theater and the plane piloted by L.S. Miles, San Bernardino commercial aviator. The game was held to settle a bet between Miles and Albert D. Stetson, resident manager of the West Coast.



After the plane and searchlight had played tag in the air for half an hour, it was conceded by the judges that Miles had a light shade, although the game proved so close that no

definite decision was made, the question still being open to debate between Miles and Stetson.

Starting from his flying field at Mt. Vernon and Highland avenues, the airman flew high over the city. The searchlight picked him up and from then on it was a pretty sight to watch. Miles nose dived and worked all the daredevil stunts in flying to elude the searchlight. On two or three occasions he was successful although it was not very many minutes before the powerful beam of the light again spotted him hiding in the clouds.

Scores of San Bernardinans watched the unusual game from the streets and rooftops. Stetson and Miles were still arguing at a late hour last night as to who won.

Miles' next aviation undertaking was probably fostered by his adventuresome nature and the lure of greater financial rewards. As mentioned above, he had been involved with local air races both at Shandin Hills and Tri-City airports. Now the opportunity came for higher levels of competition.

Today the speed and size of airplanes limits air racing to select venues: Reno, Nevada; Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and coastal cities for the usually over water Red Bull Series. But in the days following World War I the speed of air racers made it possible to hold races wherever there were a few empty acres of land. People flocked to Cleveland, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York, Omaha, Detroit, Dayton, Philadelphia, Spokane, Chicago, and too many small towns to list.

The romance of flying was still relatively new, and aviation articles like the one Miles wrote for the June 1935 *Popular Science* magazine added to the excitement and glamour:

On sixteen foot wings, we were ripping through the air at 220 miles an hour. Three of us were bunched on the Cleveland back-stretch, fighting for the lead during the 1934 Air Races. So tiny was my cockpit that I had not room for even a parachute, and so small were the racing ships we flew that reporters referred to our speed battle as "the race of the baby buggies."

Nearing the pylon, we banked into a rocketing 200 mile-an-hour turn. Barely thirty feet beneath my lower wingtip, the ground was a dizzying blur. Suddenly, I saw one of the other pilots dive between me and the pylon, going into the turn too fast for his wings to hold. They mushed through the air, carrying his plane almost into the path of my steel propeller.

It was all over in a wink. I kicked right rudder and rocked the stick in the same direction. My speed was so great that the move literally jerked the plane sidewise 500 feet into the air. A moment later, I was diving again with the engine wide open, in an effort to make up lost ground.

It is such thrills as this that keep the racing pilot on his toes. In jockeying my 742-pound baby buggy into the money in forty-seven races at meets from coast to coast, I have had my share of high-pressure excitement. I have been flipped upside down at 200 miles an hour. I have had a tire explode in a mile-a-minute landing. I have seen a rival's ship tear to pieces in the air almost under my nose. I have come down for dead-stick landings in mosquito ships that touch the earth at nearly 100 miles an hour.

My little racer designed by Leon Atwood and myself, measures only sixteen feet from wing tip to wing tip. It is the fastest plane of its type in the world. It will outclimb the swiftest pursuit ship, zooming to an altitude of 10,000 feet in two minutes and ten seconds. Officials have clocked it at 235 miles an hour. I am sure I have broken the 240 mark in straightaway sprints. Imagine yourself in the cockpit of such a baby racer. The plane is "tailored to fit." There is no room for a parachute, and your head almost touches the transparent hood that covers the cockpit. Ahead of you are a few dials on the instrument panel, a tachometer, an altimeter, a speed indicator, a cylinder-head thermocouple and oil-pressure and oil-temperature indicators. Superchargers boost

the power of the inverted, four cylinder, air cooled Menasco motor in a race. Our racing ships are classified according to the cylinder capacity of the engines. Mine is in the 375-cubic inch class. More than a dozen times it has outdistanced speed planes of twice its power.

How much of the article came from Miles and how much from a *Popular Science* editor, I'm not sure. Either way it has a sense of the excitement the public associated with air racing at that time. In 1934 Lee was the fastest in his class having broken a world's record.

It was 1933 when Lee started seriously thinking of racing on a national level. He and Leon Atwood shared the hopes of, according to Atwood, "...building a racing plane and getting into what we thought was the easy money and fun of air racing."

In early May, Miles found an engine and propeller he could buy. Atwood came up with the money, and later in an article in *The San Bernardino Sun* he described what followed as they rushed to get ready for a big race scheduled for Los Angeles in a little over a month: "There were no plans drawn in advance, they were actually drawn as construction was being done. Lee and Larry [*Larry Brown who designed several successful air racers*] and myself would discuss a construction problem or detail, settle on something. Larry would draft it, and at the same time work would be in progress."

Realizing their engine was outclassed by other builders, they went to engine builder Al Menasco for help in building a supercharged engine. Atwood continued, "We all put in longer and longer hours each day...and the evening before the opening day found us still in the shop doing a thousand and one things to try to finish the plane so that Lee could attempt the qualifications on the morrow." Persistence paid off and Lee qualified at over 200 mph on his second run.



John Underwood photo

Miles and Leon Atwood, and Miles-Atwood Special

Cleveland, Ohio was usually the home of the National Air Races, but in 1933 they were July 1-4, in Los Angeles. After qualifying, Lee entered eight events. He came home with two first place finishes, two thirds, one fourth, two fifths, and a seventh in the Shell Speed Dash where he was clocked at 210.64 mph. He was also \$1400 richer.



John Underwood photo

Early Miles-Atwood Special

Stories in the local newspapers, even allowing for home town pride, give a quick view of Miles' racing successes:

LEE MILES VICTOR IN THREE DASHES; FLIES 285-MILES PER HOUR

LOCAL FLYER WINS TROPHY AT U.S. AIR TOURNEY

MILES TO COMPETE IN AIR DASH FOR \$10,000 PRIZES

MILES DASHES TO VICTORY IN OMAHA RACES

LEE MILES OUT IN FRONT AFTER FAST 50 MILES

MILES SCORES NEW VICTORY

But it wasn't just in San Bernardino that Lee's name was becoming known. Listed in the program of the "Press Club of Chicago, Official Farewell Party," along with Ernst Udet and Tito Falconi, German and Italian World War I aces respectively, Jimmy Doolittle, Frank Hawks, Roscoe Turner, Wylie Post, Eddie Rickenbacher, and others, was Lee Miles.



**PRESS CLUB OF CHICAGO
OFFICIAL FAREWELL PARTY**

IN HONOR OF
The Famous Fliers and Visiting Newspapermen Covering the
International Air Races
LABOR DAY NIGHT, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 4th, 1933
10 P. M. to 10 A. M.—or Something.

Sponsored by *Kendall Refining Co., Bradford, Pa.*
The Most Stupendous Social Gathering of Illustrious Airmen and Airladies
in the History of Aviation.

Plenty of Eats—Beer—Libations—Dancing
Ten Thousand Dollar Floor Show of Stellar Attractions
AMONG OUR MANY GUEST ARTISTS: Olsen and Johnson, World's
Foremost Wholesale Laugh Manufacturers; Jack Whiting, Vera Marshe,
Joan Abbott, Betty Allen, Doris Grody.

Feature Artists from Chicago Civic Opera Co., Keith Vaudeville and
Chicago Theaters.

UNVEILING CEREMONIES AT 1 A. M.
Unveiling of Miss America of 1933.

A large bevy of American Beauty Show-Girls from the popular musical comedy, "Take a Chance," now packing them in at the Erlanger Theater, WILL
BE HOSTESSES TO UNATTACHED AND LONESOME CELEBRATED
FLYERS.

HERB SHEARER, Impresario.
AL DUNLAP, Master of Ceremonies.
Quite Informal and Not a Stag Party (OVER)

**A Few of Our Distinguished Honor Guests of
the Evening (and Morning)**

MAJ. ERNST UDET—*The Pride of Germany*

LT. TITO FALCONI—*Italy's Ace*

JIMMY DOOLITTLE

FRANK HAWKS

ROSCOE TURNER

WYLIE POST

LON YANCEY

JIMMY HAZLIP

MAY HAZLIP

JIMMY MATTERN

JOHNNY MILLER

ART GOEBEL

EDDIE RICKENBACHER

LEE MILES

LT. COMMANDER T. G. W. SETTLE

GEORGE HALDEMAN

CASEY JONES

Miles' best racing year was 1934. He raced in Omaha, Buffalo, New Orleans, Cleveland, Miami, and other cities, winning several races, and placing well in those he didn't win. In New Orleans he met Gov. Huey Long who gave him a souvenir derby hat which Lee made his trade mark, wearing it while flying, and having other racing pilots autograph it.



Minette Marcelli photo

Miles wearing his derby

The derby was nice, but the real achievements of 1934 were: winning the first ever Louis William Greve Trophy race — being named the number one closed course air racer — and establishing a world's speed record for aircraft in the Miles-Atwood Special class of planes (those with engine displacements of 350 cubic inches or less.)

The Greve trophy was established to increase the competition in racers of smaller engine size, 550 cubic inches or less. It was flown in three heats, the winner being selected on points won in those heats. The total value of the race was \$25,000, to be distributed among the racers.

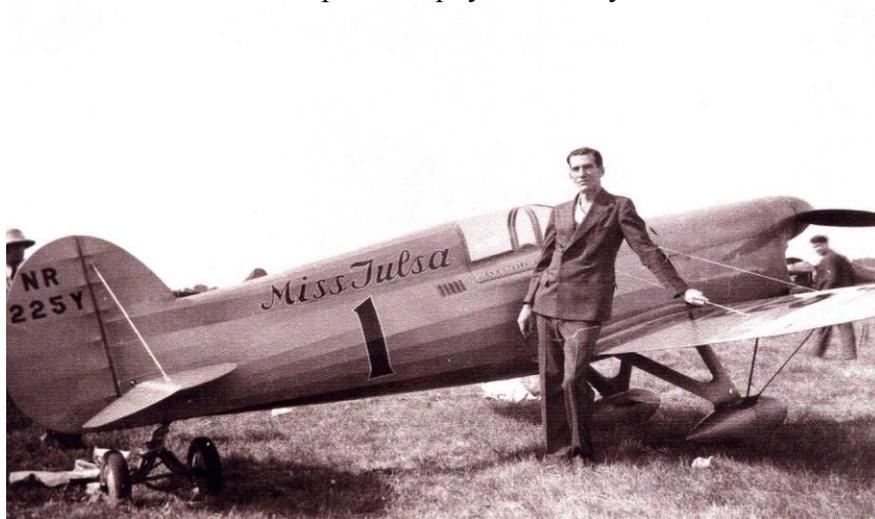
Miles reached 206.24 mph to take the first place trophy, and won \$1445.



Minette Marcelli photo

Miles with Greve Trophy

After viewing all of Lee's competitions in 1934, the National Aeronautic Association named him the top closed course racer of the year, which allowed him to paint number one on the Miles-Atwood Special. Roscoe Turner who had won the Thompson Trophy race that year was number two.



John Underwood photo

Number One

Setting the world record took several flights. Competing at the All-American Air meet in Miami, Florida, on his first try he won the 15 mile triangular race with a speed of 194.51 mph, but fell short of the established record of 207.39 set in 1933 by Delmottee, a French pilot. The next attempt was faster, but not fast enough. Cross-winds limited him to 205.987 mph.

Planning to race next at New Orleans, Lee remained in Miami a few days longer to make another attempt, which he described in an article written for the *Miami Beach Tribune*, Thursday, January 18, 1934:



I knew the ship could do it, if I could only fly her under the right wind conditions. At sunrise I went to the weather bureau and I learned that a 16-mile northerly I wind was blowing. This made the course rather slow, as it lay north-east.

But there was no other choice, so I took off shortly after 8 o'clock, flying low around the field. I took the first pylon at about 100 (feet, making a wider bank than usual to avoid too much wing strain, as the struts had been damaged in landing Sunday. This slowed down my time.

The motor hummed along nicely. I had a watch hung around my neck so I could tell when to look [for the second pylon at Pompano. The cockpit of the ship is so small [that it is difficult to see anything outside, least of all a squat little I pylon.

As I rounded the second pylon, men placed there to cheek on my time waved to me. I glanced at [the watch and realized that I had made half the run in 81/2 minutes. Then I yanked the throttle wide open.

The visibility was perfect, but the air was surprisingly choppy for so early in the morning. Just as a rough sea slows a ship's progress, so will choppy air cut down a plane's speed. This calls for constant use of the controls, and at high speed it is desirable to use the controls as little as possible to eliminate drag.

But even though the conditions were not ideal, they did not interfere with the record run. The little ship ate up home stretch like a piece of cake—and that snap finish made for good digestion. I brought the plane down and rushed over to Bill Enyart to find out what the chronograph had to say

It certainly was good to hear him

Say, "Well, you made it, Lee." A few minutes later he had the figures all puzzled out. I'd like to have beat the Frenchman's time by a wider margin, but it was-a broken record just the same.

A lot of credit goes to "Slim" Savage, my mechanic, who worked tirelessly to get the plane in shape. And Bill Enyart proved to be a first class sport, staying over four days just to let me make a stab at the record.

The course here at Miami is exceptionally good for the 100-kilometer run. It affords several emergency landing places, and the climate is suitable as a rule.

My previous failures are in part attributed to improper racing fuel. In the Green Trophy race Sunday the gasoline set up a violent detonation that shook several fuel connections loose. In my subsequent speed tests these cracks widened into sizeable leaks.

On the Monday run the gasoline poured out in such a stream that there was actual danger of an explosion as it passed the burning exhaust pipes. It sprayed my face, scorching the side of it. But it's all over now, just another episode in the racing game, an occupation, packed with color and excitement.

I've done a lot of plane crashing I for Paramount pictures; I've done! considerable stunting and commercial flying—piloting Ann Harding's plane for two years; but no branch of flying can compare with speed racing. The thrill of competition gets you, whereas in stunt I flying all the thrills are for the spectators.

Even though he now held a world's record and was rated number one in his class, Lee didn't forget the people at home who followed his career in the local papers. On May 27, 1934 *The Sun* reported on the impromptu "show" he put on:

"Here she comes! There she goes!" That was San Bernardino's reaction yesterday when the city caught its first glimpse in flight of Lieut. Leland S. Miles' tiny racing monoplane.

Miles took the plane to the Dycer airport in Los Angeles where he will compete with other daring race pilots in an air meet Memorial day. Before heading toward Los Angeles he circled the business district several times at a speed well over 200 miles an hour in his trim little ship, with which he established a world speed record recently.

Miles took off from Kendall drive just north of Shandin hills while officers of the California highway patrol temporarily halted traffic. He circled over town, then headed toward Los Angeles landing at the Dycer airport 17 and a half minutes later.



John Underwood photo

Miles-Atwood Special

While 1934 had been a good year, his successes put a strain on Miles' personal life. In an article in the *Prescott Sunday Courier* of March 20, 1994, his daughter Corinne remembers, "...Pilots were considered very romantic during the '20s and '30s, and groupies followed fliers everywhere. Such women contributed to the eventual deterioration of Lee and LaVonne's marriage.... The risk of flying and the constant demands on his time were burdensome on his wife. A lull in income and some mounting debts were too much for Lavonne, and they were separated."



Minette Marcelli photo

Lee & LaVonne Miles

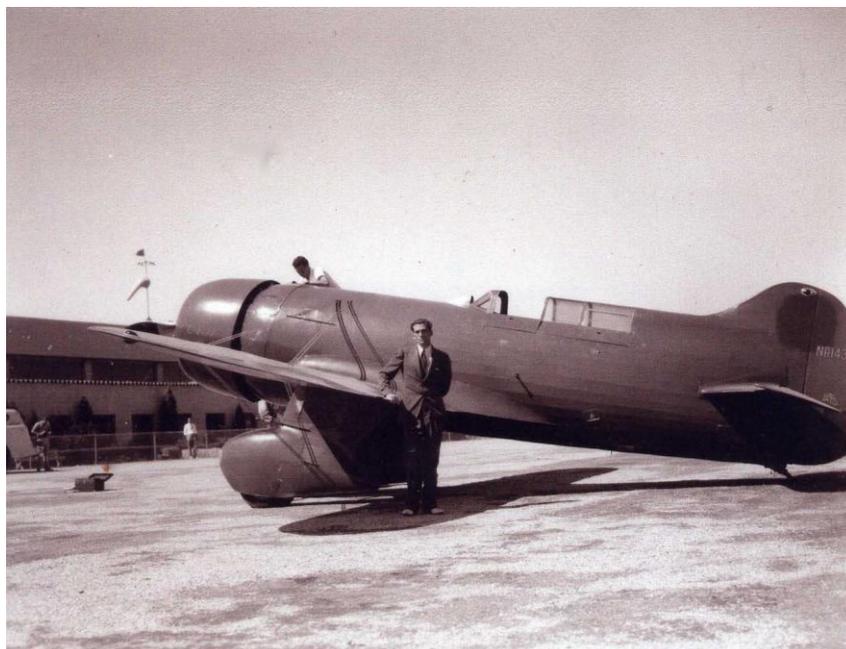
In the 1935 National Air Races, Lee's standing dropped. He could only manage 197.722 mph from the Miles-Atwood Special, and ended up with one first and one second in the 375 cubic inch displacement events. His attempt at flying another plane wasn't successful either. He flew a Seversky amphibian in the Thompson Trophy race, the only amphibian ever to enter that race, and placed fifth. His total winnings at Cleveland were only \$2,195 compared with \$3,935 in 1934.



Seversky Amphibian

In 1936 the National Air Races were held in Los Angeles. Lee's ranking was now fourth in closed course racing so the number on the side of the Miles-Atwood Special was changed from the number one it had carried. The Special and its Menasco engine were aging. He managed one lap at 223.159, but ended up with two thirds and one fourth, for a total of \$1150.

He again tried another plane for the Thompson Trophy race. He flew the last of the Gee Bee (Granville Brothers) racers, the QED, but engine trouble forced him out in lap eleven.



John Underwood photo

Miles and the QED

I'm sure Lee hoped for a better year in 1937. He had a new engine in the Miles-Atwood Special, and had made some changes in the wind screen. Getting ready to leave for Cleveland he was still close to the family. His older sister, Minette, wrote to her daughter telling of seeing Lee:

Lee came in a week ago, Monday night went on to LA. Tuesday and was busy getting the racing plane ready for Leon to take to Cleveland and for him. Sunday he took Fred's [*his brother*] plane and flew down and brought Mama [*his mother*] home. She was so pleased with the trip. Monday he took Corrine and Cornelias two children and another boy from Arlington to LA for the day.

Mrs. Errington [*Lee's mother-in-law*] phoned Lavonne and made an appointment for her to meet Lee and Corinne....

He is to be in races over Labor Day in Cleveland. He plans to fly some other ships besides his own too....

Lee left early this AM. He would have liked to see every one but you know how busy he is on these trips. He managed to take Mama and Mrs. Readle for a ride around over here and Redlands. We didn't see his plane only in the air.



John Underwood photo

Bound for Cleveland

Lee flew his Cessna while Leon pulled a trailer holding the Miles-Atwood Special. Their plans were to enter the Special in the Greve and other races, and maybe pilot a Seversky in the Thompson.

Lee used the Cessna two days before the races to help a competitor. Roger Don Rae needed a new carburetor for his plane, and the nearest one was in South Bend, Indiana so Lee flew to pick it up. The next day he got ready to qualify the Special.

Flying at about 200 feet he started around the first pylon. Apparently one of the fittings connecting the supporting wires that ran between the wing and the fuselage broke. The wing, losing that support, folded, and the imbalance of lift caused the whole plane to roll rapidly, so rapidly a pilot who viewed the accident said they couldn't count the revolutions. The plane came down in a wooded area. One report says he was dead when rescuers reached him, another says he died on the way to the hospital. There was no fire, for Lee had remembered to cut the switches before he hit the ground. He had never before in all his various flying experiences seriously damaged a plane or hurt a passenger.

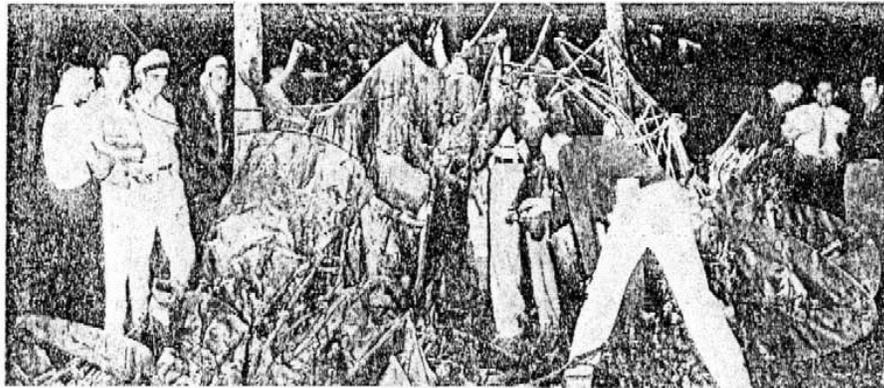
CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER

CLEVELAND, FRIDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 3, 1937

28 PAGES

MILES DIES IN AIR CRASH

Crumpled Wreckage and Speed Pilot, Killed



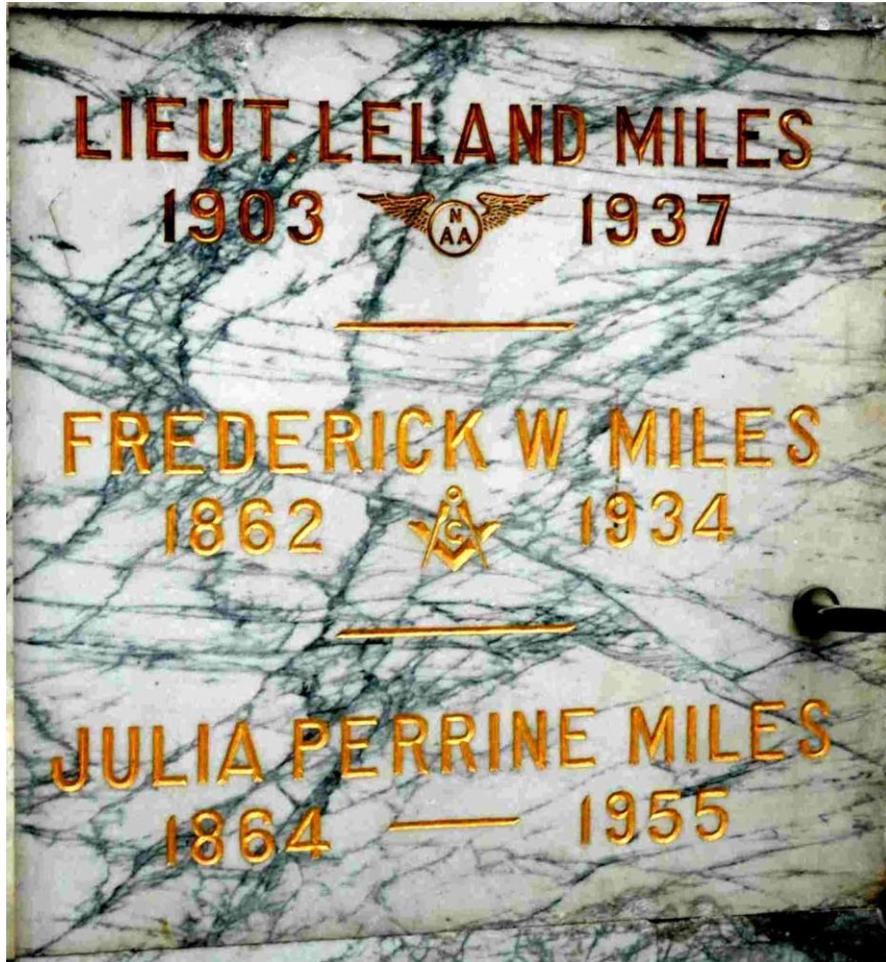
The racing world was shocked and saddened, but the show went on. Rudy Kling won both the Greve and the Thompson races. Interestingly enough, Roger Don Rae whose carburetor Miles flew in from South Bend, came in 4th in the Greve.

Leon Atwood, after conferring with Lee's family took charge of things in Cleveland. Miles' body was cremated and brought home to San Bernardino for services. James Lindsley, who had been a member of the *Sun* editorial staff, and was a close friend of Lee's wrote the newspaper report:

The flaming spirit of Lee Miles was honored by friends and relatives in San Bernardino yesterday.

In a hushed and solemn ceremony which contrasted strangely yet appropriately with the flashing tempo which marked his earthly existence, several score intimates paid their final tribute to the big World war aviator who died amid the tangled wreckage of his crippled airplane in Cleveland Sept.2.

The memorial service, held at the Mark B. Shaw Co. chapel, was simple, as would have probably been the wish of the flier, who died as he lived—spectacularly. Several hymns were played on the organ. Timothy Sheahan, Christian Science reader, read from the Scriptures and from the Christian Science textbook and then an urn bearing the ashes of the famous aviator was borne to Mountain View cemetery to be placed beside those of his father, who died some years ago.



Author's photo

Buried in Mt. View Cemetery

Leon Atwood, who Lee had taught to fly, and who had supported him financially, and in every other way possible, and had been there when Lee crashed, said, “After that happened, I returned to California and went back to ranching. I continued to fly for pleasure until World War II when I became a civilian flight instructor. I’ve never actually forgotten flying.”

Atwood later was a City Councilman in San Bernardino, and in 1968 he renewed his aviation interests by welcoming a glider club to his Five Winds Ranch in Yucaipa. He died in 1995.

Miles would have been only thirty-eight in 1941 when the United States entered World War II. Would he like Leon have become an instructor or would he already have been off trying to join the Flying Tigers or some other group that pre-dated the official entry of the U.S. into the war?

Beside his grave about all that remains to remind today’s generations of his efforts is a replica of the Miles-Atwood Special in the Planes of Fame Museum in Chino, California.



Author's photo

Miles-Atwood Special replica

Gordon Israel, racer and builder-designer of the racer *Redhead*, possibly best summed up that early air racing age:

There were a lot of airplanes in that era that came unglued structurally but the last thing we had to worry about in our planes was the structure.

You've seen so many people hurt beyond the doctor's repair due to structural failures and there were a lot of them in the thirties. People would find an angel, go out and buy a lot of stuff and start building an airplane, with very little consideration for the structure.

It backfired on a lot of guys. Poor old Lee Miles was one. An excellent pilot, he had his plane just come apart on him. I'll tell you when you had a six cylinder supercharged Menasco in your plane you had enough problems keeping it going without having to worry about the structure.

Saving the past for the future since 1888