

The History Of Pittsburgh
Institute
Of
Aeronautics

In the Beginning...

D. Barr Peat, a young surveying engineer, decided to develop the sloping pastures atop the hill from Dravosburg, Pa into an airfield instead of a housing development. Mr. Peat and his financial partner Clifford Ball, a McKeesport auto dealer, established the airfield and called it the Pittsburgh-McKeesport Airport.

McKeesport became the hub of the "flying crazies," the barnstorming pilots who meant as much then as the National Football League does today in terms of spectator entertainment. The crowds gathered at Mr. Peat's airport to watch the pilots and their amazing stunts and gape wide-eyed while the folk heroes of the air - including Charles Lindberg - pulled their wonderful machines to a halt at the flight line.

Right: Construction and paving of the runways for the Pittsburgh-McKeesport airport, completed in 1927.

Opposite Page: Lt. Cyrus Bettis, winner of the Pulitzer trophy race, International Air Races, 1925.



...Bettis Airpor



On November 13, 1926 the Pittsburgh McKeesport Airport was rededicated by J. Peat and Mr. Ball in honor of Lt. Bettis, a Michigan native. Lt. Bettis, owner of the Pulitzer Trophy for attaining the world airspeed record of 249 miles per hour, died August 31, 1926 at age 33. Lt. Bettis's airplane crashed into the fog-shrouded mountains in Centre county eight days before his death. Lt. Bettis sustained severe injuries but managed to crawl six miles from the scene to a place where he was picked up and taken to hospital. He was later transported to Walter Reed Hospital, Washington, DC where he died of complications developing from his injuries. Bettis Airport retained its name until after the end of World War II at which time the Atomic Energy Commission and Westinghouse Electric Corporation agreed to build an atomic plant. This plant is the site of the development of the first atomic engine on the Nautilus submarine. The site where J. Peat opened his air spectacles years earlier is now the Westinghouse Electric Corporation Atomic Power Laboratory, Bettis Site.

As Time Went By.



American Legion Air Meet!

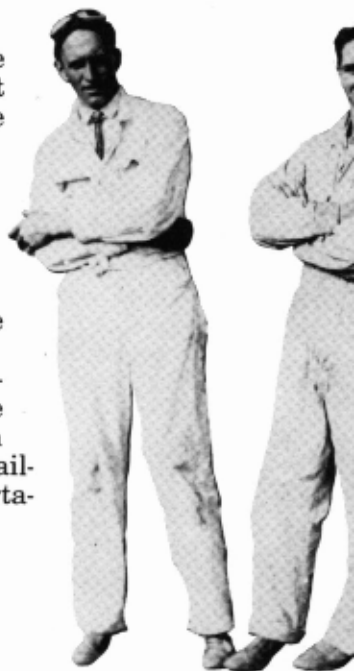
Pittsburgh-McKeesport Air Port
October 17 and 18
Nineteen hundred twentyfive

Left: Front page of the Official program for the air meet on October 17 & 18, 1925.

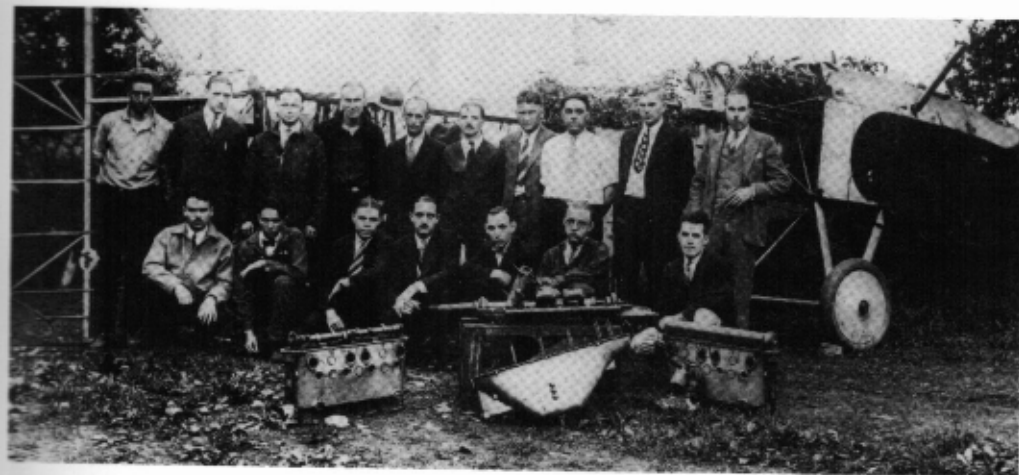
Below: Curtiss-Wright Flying Service 1927-29. Fore-runner of Pittsburgh Institute of Aeronautics.



As the industry grew and the training became more sophisticated, the student enrollment grew with the changing times. In order to accommodate the larger enrollments the institute bought a building located in the city of Pittsburgh that could be used for all the primary training. This location, called the aviation building, also made access to the school much easier because of the availability of public transportation.



Above: Parachutist Romer Weyant and mechanic Homus Skelton operating one of the first airplanes from Bettis Airport - 1926.



Above Left: First ground school class operated by Bob Trader at Bettis Airport in 1927.



Left: Bettis Airport during one of the early airshows.



Above: Charles Lindbergh and the Spirit of St. Louis visiting Bettis Airport - 1929.



Above: The Aviation Building, Pittsburgh, Pa.



Above: Out of state students photographed in front of the Aviation Building, Pittsburgh, Pa., December 12, 1946.

STANDING (left to right): Steve Kristoff, William Holder, Louis Kozik, William Pennybacker, James Prince, Charles Bursey, Robert Drury, Lynch, Robert Ruble, Arthur Rush, George Harrington, Robert V. Richard Murphy, Murray Bain, James Murphy, Robert Chase, Richard Wright, Floyd Graham.

SEATED (left to right): Pete Zeoli, David Fairley, William Schuab, Connovitch, Jack Nemo, Harry Poole, Dr. Lyons, John Hazen, H. Mills, William McKinnon, George Bremmer, Walter Andersen.

The aviation building housed the school's administrative offices and the classrooms and shop areas for all the primary training. Airplanes were hoisted to the fifth and sixth floors where they were used for student practices. The engine department ran engines on the roof of the building where engine stands had been mounted to the roof surface. The six floors of the aviation building were packed with airframe and engine equipment together with the facilities for training in other aviation fields such as Drafting, Aeronautical Engineering, Aviation Secretarial, Aircraft Radio Repair, and Instrument Repair.

Right: Primary Engine Shop located on the fifth floor of the Aviation Building - 1945.

Below: Students in the Instrument Repair Shop.





Above: Typing room for the Aviation Secretarial School.

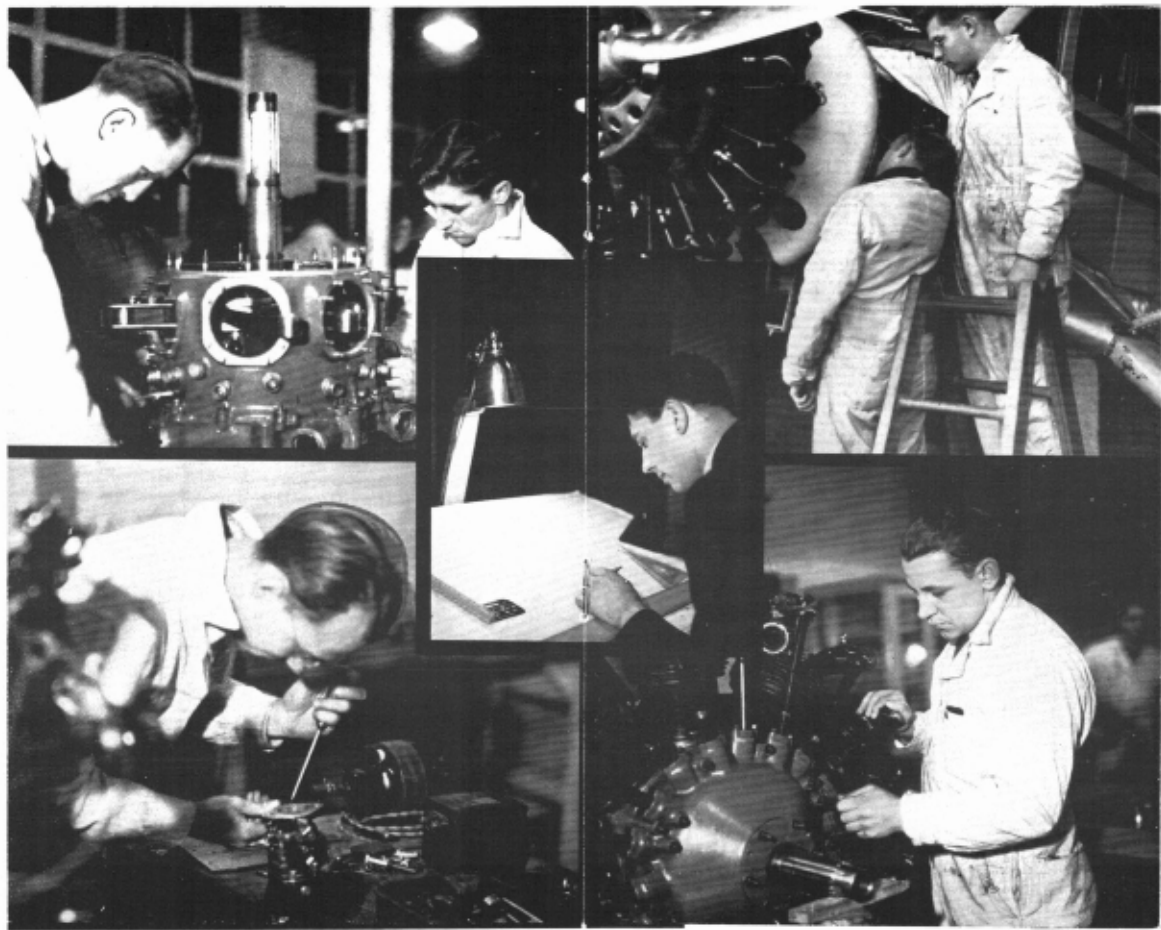
Left: Airplane rigging and engine inspection in the advanced shops at Bettis Airport.



In addition to the resident courses being conducted, PIA also had an extension division that provided homestudy courses in aviation maintenance. The final phase of study for the extension course students was to visit and spend time at Bettis Airport to enhance their home studies with some practical applications.

When the students in the resident airframe and powerplant courses completed their primary training in the aviation building, they completed the final phases of advanced work by going to Bettis Airport to work in the airframe and powerplant repair shops. There they worked as mechanic helpers under the supervision of the shop mechanics who were operating a full fixed-base repair operation.

Above: Don LaVallee, Instructor, with a class of extension course students at Bettis Airport in September, 1941.



Left: Engine shops at Airport.

The Major Change...



Above: A group of PIA mechanics, students, and instructors in front of a famous Ford Tri-Motor at Bettis Airport.

After the end of World War II and the decision of the federal government to buy the Bettis site for the construction of the Westinghouse Atomic Plant, PIA was forced to abandon its airport facility and to establish its first training area on Allegheny County Airport. Allegheny County Airport had been completed circa 1931 and was serving as the county's municipal airport where the airlines operated until the opening of Greater Pittsburgh International Airport.

In 1946 PIA constructed its first facility on Allegheny County Airport that would serve as the advanced repair area in the manner that Bettis had done.



PIA's original facility at Allegheny County Airport. Note PIA's surplus B-24 bomber in the left corner.



Classroom building converted from the Slick Air Freight Building.

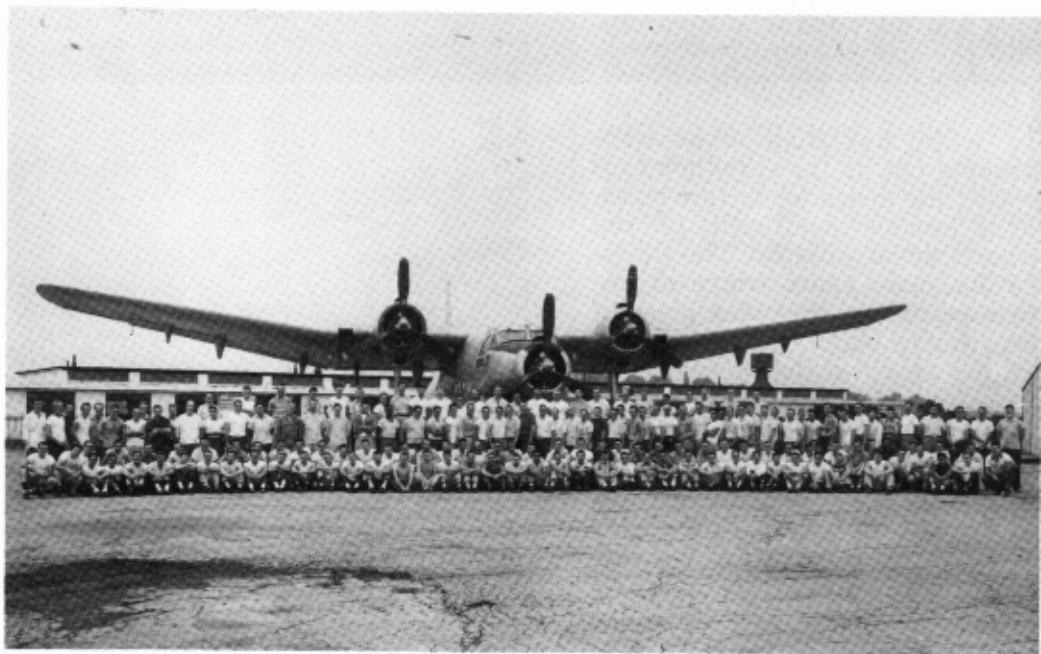


A closeup of PIA's B-24 Bomber - 1947.

The Additions Begin...

By 1950 the Institute sold the aviation building in downtown Pittsburgh and concentrated all of its training programs in the Allegheny County Airport facility. During the early 50's economic conditions of the country impeded the expansion of the aviation industry, but by 1955 conditions had changed and the school began an expansion program that has continued for more than thirty years.

The first major expansion occurred when PIA acquired an adjacent building from the slick Air Freight Co. and then converted it into classroom areas. This was put into use in June 1955 and the additional space made it possible to increase enrollment.



Above: The staff and student body assembled in front of the Northrop YC-125 - 1955.



Airframe shop additions to the main facility.

Upon completion of the new building, a dedication ceremony was held in honor of Clifford Ball who was a student at PIA. Barr Peat had initiated the development of the Pittsburgh-McKeesport Airport. Clifford Ball also organized the Clifford Ball Airline and provided airmail pickup with hookups for his own Airplanes. Clifford Ball's airline evolved into All American Airlines, then to Capital Airlines, which is now part of United Airlines.

The continual growth of PIA and the student body soon made it necessary to consider an expansion of the main building. With approval from the Board of Directors a building was added to the 1958 expansion. A new building section was added, extending into the old parking lot toward Lebanon Church Road. The addition of this space made it possible to increase the number of privately-owned airplanes that could be brought into the airframe shops for students to work on.

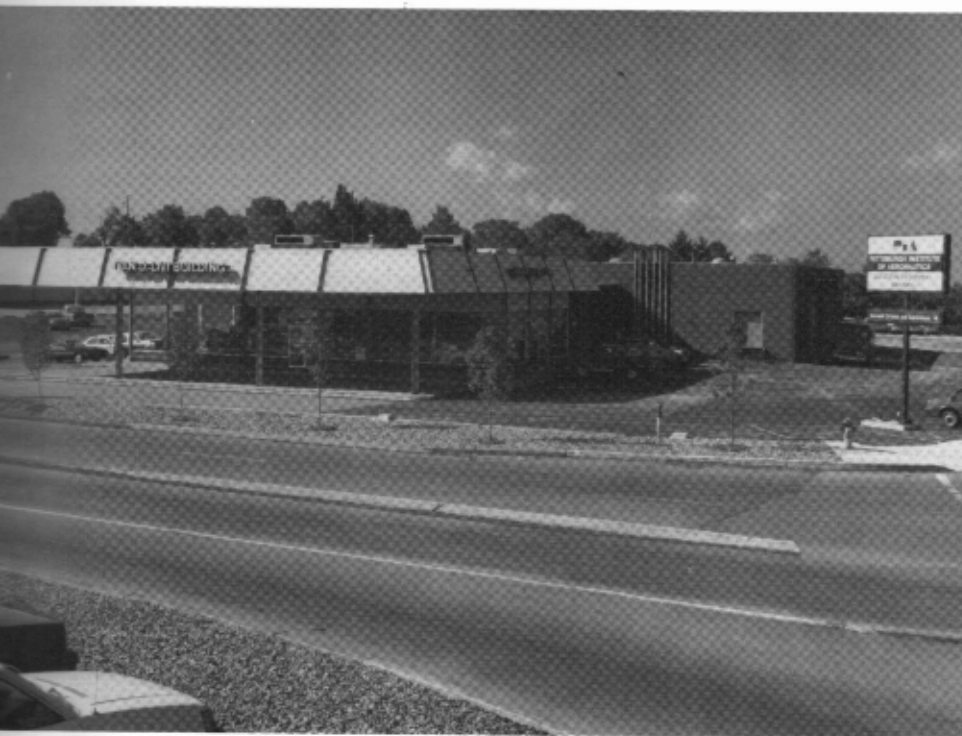
The Satellites...

After the addition of the Slick Air Freight and the Clifford Ball buildings all facility expansions were part of the PIA main building. After completion of the new lunchroom the Institute investigated the purchase of a building located on the opposite side of Lebanon Church Road and off of the County Airport property. The building was originally part of a Sears complex and served as the auto service center. The building is a clear-span two-story building of 36,000 square feet with the second story being underground as a basement. The building was purchased and extensive renovations were done. After completion of the renovations the building was dedicated to PIA President Ivan D. Livi and is known as the Ivan D. Livi Building. The entire powerplant department was moved into this facility and it houses classrooms, shops, and vending areas for the students. The property around the building has parking facilities for 160 automobiles. The showroom that had been used by an auto dealer has been converted into a PIA showroom that has three homebuilt airplanes, PIA's shuttle, jet engines, reciprocating engines and an OX5 engine that belongs to the Western Pennsylvania Wing of the OX5 Club.

The I.D.L. building is used by the Second and Third Quarter students for their jet and reciprocating engine work and by the Steel Center Powerplant students.



The Administration Building site of PIA's offices and training areas.



The Ivan D. Livi Building, dedicated April 10, 1988.

In the spring of 1988 it became apparent that the increasing enrollments would require another facility. With the enrollment nearing the 1000 student mark it was necessary to consider the acquisition of additional instructional facilities.

The operator of the Exxon service station on the opposite corner of Lebanon Church Road was approached and after some negotiations the Institute brought the property for still another building. Architectural designs were completed and a contract was let to the Crump Construction Company for the construction of a three-story classroom and laboratory building that would have 36,000 square feet of area. Construction of this facility began on September 15, 1988 and was completed in August of 1989. Occupancy began with classes in October 1989.

In 1958 an expansion by adding space to the original facility was made that increased the areas for shop use by 6,000 square feet. Additions to the programs had been made and the additional area provided the space needed for the corresponding practical work.

The additional shop areas were adequate but as the enrollment increased the space for lecture classrooms became insufficient for the larger student groups. The necessity for more space triggered another expansion that took place in 1965. A new building was constructed that provided the space needed for additions to the electrical departments and an even higher enrollment. The new building was located adjacent to the main facility and housed classrooms and electrical laboratories.

Right: This view from the air shows the added shop areas protruding to the left of the original building.

Below: Clifford Ball Building, dedicated to the aviation pioneer who, with D. Barr Peat, initiated the construction of the Pittsburgh-McKeesport Airport.



And Now...

In November 1990 PIA purchased the National Intergroup, Inc. hangar located adjacent to PIA's facility on Allegheny County Airport. The hangar has more than 22,000 square feet of space and it will be used to expand the Advanced Airframe area. It will house PIA's Sabreliner, Grumman Mohawk and the Beech U8-D's being used by both the Airframe and Powerplant Departments. The addition of the hangar to PIA's facilities increased the total instructional area to 184,000 square feet. The airplane ramp area around the hangar is an additional 16,744 square feet that makes the total more than 200,000.

**More than Six Decades of
Aviation Maintenance Training**



PIA's Graham Building which houses Science, Elec Avionics classrooms and labs.



PIA's advanced training Hangar Two.