

## 25 Years Ago, May 1991



**May 18** Russia launches Soyuz TM-12. Among the crew is Helen Sharman, the first astronaut from the U.K. She is the first woman on the Mir space station and first non-U.S., non-Soviet woman in space. *Flight International*, May 15-21, p. 13; and May 29-June 4, p. 17.

**May 24** As part of an attempt to evacuate 14,000 Ethiopian Jews to safety in Israel, an El Al Boeing 747-200C passenger-freighter convertible airlifts 1,200 densely packed refugees. This was the first time that more than 1,000 people are carried in one aircraft. The aircraft was designed to carry 760 people in high-capacity seating, but room was made for almost 500 more. *David Baker, Flight and Flying: A Chronology*, p. 485.



## 50 Years Ago, May 1966

**May 5** Britain's solid-propellant Skylark sounding rocket, carrying solar X-ray instruments built by U.K.'s University College in London and Leicester University, makes its sixth flight from the Woomera rocket range in Australia. The Skylark takes X-ray pictures and other measurements to study the distribution of X-ray phenomena associated with the sun. *Flight International*, May 19, p. 853.

**May 11** The descent system of the Surveyor soft-landing moon probe is dropped 300 meters from a balloon in a test at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico. This is the first time the system operates all the way to a soft landing. In previous tests, the vehicle was lowered by parachute for the final 150 meters. *Aviation Week*, May 16, p. 37.

**May 18** British aviatrix Sheila Scott takes off from London Airport in a Piper Comanche 260B for a 49,279-km round-the-world flight that is expected to take six weeks and is the longest solo flight ever attempted to date. She makes her first stop in Rome and on May 22 reaches Karachi, Pakistan. During those phases of her flight, Scott experiences the temporary breakdown of the autopilot and other electronics problems. *Flight International*, May 26, p. 860.



**May 23** For the first time, the full-scale test version of the Saturn 5 launch vehicle, the Saturn/Apollo 500F model, is rolled out of the Vehicle Assembly Building at Cape Kennedy on a crawler-transporter and moved toward the launch pad 5.6 kilometers away at a speed of less than 1.6 kph. *Missiles and Rockets*, May 30, p. 17.

**May 24** The first Europa 1 launch vehicle of the European Launcher Development Organization is flown at Woomera range in Australia. The vehicle is composed of a British Blue Streak first stage, and dummy French and German second and third stages. *Aviation Week*, May 30, p. 32.

**May 26** Learjet Model 24 light-twin executive jet lands at the municipal airport in Wichita, Kansas, and becomes the first business jet to circle the globe. En route, the plane also sets 18 world speed records. The plane flew 37,104 kilometers at an average speed of 805 kph over 65 hours and 40 minutes, including fuel stops. *Flight International*, June 9, p. 956 and June 16, p. 1009.

**May 30** Gustav Lachmann, the Austrian-born aviation pioneer famed for his studies of airflow phenomena and development of slotted wing, dies in Hertfordshire, England, at 70. *Flight International*, June 16, p. 1014.



## 75 Years Ago, May 1941

**May 4** The first commercial airliner crossing of the Atlantic, from Montreal to Great Britain, is made by a BOAC Consolidated Liberator, a converted heavy bomber. Albert van Hoo-reebeck, *La Conquete de L'Air*, p. 15.

**May 6** The prototype of the single-seat Republic XP-47B Thunderbolt makes its first flight. It soon becomes one of the three outstanding American fighters of World War II. The aircraft has a maximum speed of over 400 mph at 26,000 feet and earns a well-deserved reputation for ruggedness once it enters combat. Eugene Emme, ed., *Aeronautics and Astronautics 1915-60*, p. 41.



# Past

An Aerospace Chronology

by **Frank H. Winter**

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**May 10-11** Rudolf Hess, deputy führer of Germany, makes a solo flight in a Messerschmitt Bf 110 to Britain for the purpose of persuading the British government to conclude peace with Germany. He parachutes to the ground, and is arrested and remains a prisoner of war until 1945, when he is convicted as a war criminal and sentenced to life imprisonment. "Rudolf Hess" file, National Air and Space Museum.

**May 15** Britain's first jet-propelled airplane, the Gloster E.28/39 with a Whittle WIX centrifugal flow turbojet engine, conducts its first official flight of about 17 minutes at the RAF base at Cranwell, England. Ft. Lt. Gerry Sayer is the pilot. Eugene Emme, ed., *Aeronautics and Astronautics 1915-60*, p. 41; Charles Gibbs-Smith, *Aviation*, p. 211.

**May 20** The Luftwaffe's Operation Mercury sees the landing of 22,750 paratroopers on Crete, Greece. It is the largest airborne assault during the war, and results in the seizure

of the island after a long and difficult battle. Although successful, the Germans sustain so many casualties that large-scale paratroop actions are abandoned for the rest of the war. David Baker, *Flight and Flying: A Chronology*, p. 262.

**May 29** The Army Air Corps Ferrying Command, the forerunner of the Air Transport Command, is created. By May 1945 it consists of 2,461 aircraft, 798 of which are four-engined machines. Eugene Emme, ed., *Aeronautics and Astronautics 1915-60*, p. 41.

## 100 Years Ago, May 1916

**May 17** The first airplane takeoff from another plane is carried out when a Bristol Scout C, piloted by Ft. Lt. M.J. Day, Royal Naval Air Service, is launched from a Baby flying boat, with John Porte as pilot, at 1,000 feet in Harwich, England. Charles Gibbs-Smith, *Aviation*, p. 247; Francis Mason and Martin Windrow, *Know Aviation*, p. 18.



**May 18** Lt. Kiffin Rockwell becomes the first American pilot to shoot down an enemy aircraft when he destroys a German two-seater from his Nieuport 11 while flying as a member of the Escadrille Americaine. The squadron is soon renamed the Escadrille de Lafayette. Rockwell is killed in September 1916 while attacking another German two-seat light bomber. David Baker, *Flight and Flying: A Chronology*, p. 84.

**May 22** Air-to-air gunpowder rockets of French Navy Lt. Yves Le Prieur are used in combat for the first time on the Verdun front in World War I against German observation balloons called Drachens (Dragons). The rockets are fired from tubes fitted onto the wings, four on each side, of a Nieuport 11 biplane of the Escadrille N.65 squadron. Ignition is achieved electrically from switches in the cockpit. Altogether, about 50 balloons and two aircraft are claimed to have been shot down by the rockets, but they are unreliable and wind often deflects them. They are withdrawn by 1917 in favor of Rankin incendiary darts or other weapons. Mike O'Connor, "The Le Prieur Rocket and Its Inventor," *Over the Front*, Summer 1987, pp. 173-179.

