

Amelia Earhart, Hilary Swank, Richard Gere, The Friendship and LeRoy

by Lynne Belluscio

Brian Duddy called the other day to ask if I knew anything about the new movie about Amelia Earhart and I had to admit that I really wasn't aware of the movie.

It seems that Hilary Swank and Richard Gere are in a new movie about Amelia. Part of the story is about Amelia's flight across the Atlantic in June 1928 in the Tri-motor Fokker, "Friendship". You might remember that Donald Woodward bought the Friendship and had it at the DW Airport in 1928. Brian discovered that a reproduction of the "Friendship" had been constructed for the movie. The reproduction is now in the Canadian Bushpilots Heritage Center in Sault Ste Marie, north of Michigan. Brian was able to get photographs of the plane on exhibit. It is not a operating plane, but for the movie, they attached a small outboard motor to the pontoons, so the plane could appear to be taxiing out on the water. The picture above, unfortunately, is in black and white, but the plane is a bright orange. (If you visit the *Pennysaver* website, you can see the photograph in color.)

Brian Duddy's book "Wings Over LeRoy" has a chapter on the Friendship. As Brian points out, the Friendship was originally built for Commander Richard Byrd's expedition to the Antarctic. Along the way, Byrd acquired funding from Henry Ford and the Ford Motor Company and the Fokker Tri-motor was replaced by a Ford Tri-motor. Byrd sold the Fokker to the "Mechanical Science Corporation," which is believed to have been owned by Don Woodward. Who actually owned the Fokker is an interesting story and you'll have to get a copy of Brian's book to sort it all out.

On June 17, 1928, Amelia, with Lou Gordon and Wilmer Stultz took off for Europe and landed in Britain twenty hours and forty

nine minutes later. Amelia was the first woman to cross the Atlantic in a plane, although she never piloted the plane. Never the less, the transatlantic flight propelled her into the international spotlight.

We all know - - I guess we all don't know what happened to Amelia. And for that matter, the fate of the Friendship is obscured in mystery. Brian speculates that the plane, after it was sold to South American investors, was probably scrapped. It appears that it flew under the name "El Avion Rojo" - the red airplane, and may have been flying until 1931 after being seized by the Chilean government. All the photos we have are in black and white. The bright orange fuselage is so impressive in the photos of the movie plane!

From what I can find out, the movie will premier in Rochester at the Regal Theater near Marketplace Mall on Friday, October 23. I called the theater to find out the times and they don't know yet.

I mentioned that LeRoy has a connection with the movie and that Brian's book has a lot about the Friendship. They told me that the Woman's Bushpilot Association is supposed to have a table set up at the theater for the opening. (I mentioned that we have an autographed photo of Amelia and a chair from the Friendship, but I don't think that impressed them too much.) I called the *Democrat and Chronicle* to see if they were interested in the story and I believe they had talked with Brian,



but had forgotten to pass along the story to Jack Garner, so maybe they will do something about LeRoy, Donald Woodward, the Friendship and Amelia Earhart.

But if they don't, at least those of you who read the *Pennysaver* might take the opportunity to see the movie and see the plane that once flew in the air around here.

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