

# The Pittsburgh Press

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SECOND SECTION

## Inventions That Almost Worked

### Lindbergh, Other Aviation Experts Fooled By Fuelless Motor

Great Possibilities Seen Until Battery Is Found In Coils

This is the last of three articles recounting scientific discoveries, amazing in their potentialities, but "hoaxes" as far as scientists are concerned. The following story tells about an "inventor" of Elizabeth whose motor ran without fuel, so it was thought.

By CECIL B. BROWN

Lester J. Hendershot, 29, smiling and partially bald, cheerfully bore the jibes of his Elizabeth neighbors.

He had to expect them and he was used to it. For Hendershot, a road inspector, was also that prime target of wisecracks—an inventor who hadn't invented anything that would work.

But this same inconspicuous small town putterer not only startled Elizabeth, but also the nation and the world.

He invented a fuelless airplane motor—that almost worked. Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh examined it, tested it and announced:

"All I need to fly around the world now will be a bigger basket of sandwiches."

Major Thomas G. Lamphier, commander of the First Pursuit Squadron of the U. S. Air Service, Selfridge Field, Mich., was enthused:

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed.

#### Success Seemed Certain

William B. Stout, head of the aircraft division of the Ford Motor Co. inspected Hendershot's invention.

"No humbug here," he remarked. The Guggenheim Foundation for the Promotion of Aeronautics was on the verge of conducting tests.

Commerce Department aviation officials said they were convinced. Electrical engineers reported to Government officials that the motor operated successfully.

Thus was the stage set for the inventor of the fuelless motor.

Hendershot simply had the idea that the "earth currents" which made the brilliant Aurora Borealis in Northern skies could be harnessed and made to work an engine.

Just as radio cashed in on sound waves, so Hendershot was all ready to cash in on the currents which are darting between the North and South Poles.

The whole world was electrified by the announcement that here was a motor that needed neither electricity nor oil nor gasoline.

#### Other Uses Seen

Some officials thought the development for ground use might be even greater than for airplane use.

It would revolutionize all industry, and conceivably might make unnecessary the production of coal, oil and water, because energy made available in one form is easily performed into light, heat or power.

For Hendershot's fuelless motor obtained convertible energy from terrestrial magnetism and the rotation of the earth, whereby power could be supplied for a long time without fuel.

These were the claims advanced. These were the claims that had the scientific world flocking around this breezy road inspector from Elizabeth.

Hendershot's brain child whirled him dizzily to the peaks of notoriety. He hovered there for months, suspended by the tugging forces of belief and disbelief.

Then skepticism slowly inflated the bubble of his invention to a perilous tautness. And when the bubble burst in 1928, Hendershot went careening down into the same niche of inconspicuousness that he had once before occupied.

Today, at 36, he lives in a one-story, white frame house on the outskirts of Elizabeth, with his wife, Melinda, and his 11-year-old son, Lester, Jr. He has been on relief since last August, eking out a



meagre existence, barely able to meet his \$22.50 a month rent.

#### He's Through Inventing

"I wish," he mourns, "that I never would have got the idea for a fuelless motor."

"All this notice wasn't exactly my fault. Other fellows had bigger hopes than I did. I was at sea about the whole thing most of the time. I'm through inventing."

And the epitaph to his inventive inclinations came out like a long, low sigh of relief.

Now he has a new philosophy—the philosophy of where-will-it-all-end?

He says:

"There's no use inventing things. You're supposed to be crack-brained if you monkey around with apparatus. There's enough scientific stuff in the world to make men jobless without inventing anything else."

But it wasn't always that way. Back in 1927 he was an enthused person, ready to burgeon forth on a sea of riches as a genius of the scientific world.

The birth of Hendershot's "great achievement" started with a bullet which imbedded itself in his heel, and his small son's smile that lured him into building the child an airplane.

#### Shot By Bandit

Hendershot was at various times a railroad fireman and engineer. At one time he had worked at the Westinghouse Electric Co. and he was later to do a few months experimental work at Cornell University.

In 1927, while an inspector on a new Clairton road, on his way home on a dark but otherwise inauspicious night, Hendershot heard the gruff command of a highwayman to "stick 'em up."

But Hendershot didn't stick them up. He turned his short legs into pistons and sped for safety. But a bullet from the bandit's gun imbedded itself in his "achilles" heel.

Unlike the famous warrior of Greek mythology, Hendershot found a potential fortune instead of death in the vulnerability of his heel.

Laid up by the wounded foot, Hendershot bowed to the demand of Lester, Jr., for an airplane.

#### Builds Small Motor

Not an ordinary airplane did this boy want. He had that kind already. He wanted one that would really run.

Working with a model he had made, Hendershot hollowed out the solid wood block that formed the nose of the ship so that a tiny motor could fit into it. Then he built that tiny motor.

He made a magnet to put in the motor. That's where his experience at Westinghouse helped. But how he made it was his secret.

When he had finished the motor and put it into the plane, he placed the miniature flying ship down on the library table.

And then it happened! The propeller on the model started to turn!

Hendershot's mouth gaped open. He rubbed a limp hand over his eyes. He turned his back, a physical movement which he thought might evaporate what certainly must be an optical illusion.

There was no mistake about it. The propeller was whirling around at a steady clip!

Hendershot picked the plane up



"... Hendershot's great invention was the result of a bullet wound in the foot, inflicted by a bandit..."

and set it down again. The propeller stopped. He turned it around the same way it had been squatting before. The propeller started again. Lester, Jr. hopped around in great glee.

And finally he discovered that when the ship headed north and south the propeller turned, but when it headed east and west it stopped.

Out of this morass of strange happenings he could deduce only one thing — that a certain magnetism was operating the propeller when the plane was headed north or south.

But anything more than that—well, he was stumped.

He went out to Bettis Field "just for fun" with his little plane and the whirling propeller.

#### Lindbergh Enthused

There he met D. Barr Peat, manager of the field. Peat looked at the model and was amazed. He thought he saw "a good thing" so he took Hendershot under his wing.

Mr. Stout, of Ford Motor, came, saw and apparently was convinced. Then Major Lamphier, a war-

time friend of Peat's, landed at the field.

"Come on down to Selfridge Field," he invited. "We'll give you every facility for experimental work." Hendershot went.

Then the Major sent for Colonel Charles Lindbergh. The "Lone Eagle" came with his financial backers.

They all trooped to the experimental plant and Colonel Lindbergh came away with promises to "get behind the invention."

But a Pittsburgh pin pricked the bubble.

#### Invention Called Hoax

On Feb. 25 electrical engineers in Washington gave virtual sanction to the invention.

Two days later, business interests in Pittsburgh delivered a blow that stopped the fuelless motor as quickly as the lack of fuel stops a gasoline motor.

F. W. Hochstetter, research director of the Hochstetter Laboratories, warned that Hendershot's invention wasn't really an invention at all but "came under the head of a hoax."

He sent telegrams to the Guggen-

heim Foundation, to Colonel Lindbergh, Professor S. W. Stratton, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, E. G. Lieboid, of the Ford Motor Co. and Major Lamphier.

The message declared that four years before Hendershot had attempted to sell his invention to the Benedum-Trees oil interests.

Hochstetter said that the models presented by Hendershot at his laboratories were checked closely and found to contain batteries secreted in the windings of the coils.

At the same time he produced a contract purported to have been made on Dec. 2, 1924, between Hendershot and John A. Snee, of Elizabeth, and M. L. Benedum and J. C. Trees, by which Hendershot and Snee, another inventor who died several years ago, agreed to sell all rights to the invention for \$25,000 payable within 30 days.

The researcher said that after the contract was signed, Hendershot was employed at \$300 a month to work on his invention of the "fuelless" motor. The company called the products of these labors "frauds." Hendershot was fired.

#### So Failure Comes

The Guggenheim Foundation said they would not touch the invention.

Hendershot picked up and went off to Havana for several months. Ten thousand dollars had been lost in the scheme and "I got about \$4000 out of it in about five years," Hendershot said.

Hendershot insists that the principle of terrestrial magnetism is still workable—but usable for no mechanism larger than that found in an ordinary clock.

He clings to the notion that the furore over his invention came, not from his own enthusiasm, but from "the extravagant ideas of others."

"I still maintain that the device can develop power in minute quantities. Of course, I used a small battery. That's how I got my power. A six-volt battery would agitate the magnet and develop say 25 or 30 volts—step it up, that's all I did."

So Lester Hendershot, living with his family, his lost dreams, his airedale dog, his rabbits and his memories, is through with inventions and wishing he had a job.

THE END.