

Rodney Lester Larson – Introduction

Aviation, in general, has been an important part of my life. At an early age in the 1950s, I was very interested in WWII aircraft. Who wouldn't be? They were incredible machines and modern aircraft just do not have the character of the deep-throated roar of a piston engine powered aircraft. I made plastic models as a young man through high school. I, of course, started with USAAF aircraft but soon discovered that there was a large world of other aircraft involved in WWII. When I was about 10 (1954), I started to buy WWII aircraft books and photographs. I liked air shows and bought photos from them as well. I grew up on a cattle ranch/farm in Northwest Iowa & therefore was involved in the Aberdeen Angus business at a very early age. This gave me a source of income not available to most young people. I saved for my college education and expanded my desire for WWII aviation knowledge. In middle and high school, I built U-control and RC model aircraft. The RC aircraft technology was very primitive at that time, but it gave me a great sense of flying that I kept for the rest of my life. I bought a lot of photos from the US National Archives in the late 50s and 60s & was there at a very propitious moment in my life. In the 60s, the US National Archives started selling off many of the NON-Allied photos they owned, including negatives. I bought as many as I possibly could at that time. My photo collection continued to grow for many, many years. After college I was an engineer for a company that built destructive test equipment for transportation industries, i.e. auto durability tests, crash tests, aircraft structural tests, building tests for resistance to earthquakes, etc. I traveled a lot to Europe, especially Germany for the auto equipment market. My company had a Berlin branch & I spent a lot of time in the 70s there covering Europe, including behind the Iron Curtain. On the weekends, I spent going to every known Air Museum in Europe. I think I have seen most all of them. I continued to visit museums to buy books and take pictures. My photography was taken with care because I know that flash bulbs and lights harm painted surfaces. In college, I learned to fly my body. I started skydiving in 1966 and continued until my retirement from jumping in 1990. That's when I found that flying was indeed a great joy & I enjoyed the relative work part of that sport very much. I completed a total of 2,650+ jumps in my skydiving career. I was never seriously injured. I had a sprained ankle once that required me to use a crutch for about a week. I instructed over 1,000 new jumpers and had an excellent safety record with that part of the sport. I am also a FAA licensed parachute rigger. In 1980s, I learned to fly & started with a Piper Super Cub, being taught by an ex-military pilot flying from his farm in Minnesota. I was living in Minnesota at that time & I progressed to finally own my own Cessna U206F & I modified it by adding a Robertson STOL kit (slats & fowler flaps) & GEM Engine Monitor & Tanis engine heater for winter starts and finally a GPS & a full Instrument Panel-&a Set of Attachable Wipline Amphibious Floats. To date, I have 3,000+ hours total flight time covering a variety of land & floatplanes.

I have been in and worked in more than 100 countries and flown over 5 million miles on business trips. I spent most of my time in late 1990s to my 2010 retirement in Asia, primarily in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, & Singapore. I have had the pleasure of speaking with many (>100) pilots & several ground crew that flew in WWII in various aircraft. About 1/2 were Luftwaffe or Finnish or Romanian Air Force pilots. About 1/4 were Japanese, and the rest a mishmash of others. I enjoyed talking to them about 3 things: 1) tactics & 2) their training & 3) their mounts and what they thought of them as effective weapons.

In 1988, I started a photo website of WWII aircraft called Warbirdphotographs.com; I have a subset of that site called Luftwaffephotos.com. I didn't know much then and did not spend a lot of time on the site since early 2000s.

At the peak, I have owned about 25,000 actual photographs and about 5,000 negatives of aircraft. I have already gifted my negatives to museums around the world because of the prohibitive cost of storage of such fragile items. Perhaps some researcher will get some help from some of them. I don't know if many of them can actually be used to make new prints or not. That is up to the individual recipients.

Since my retirement in 2010 and my stopping actual field work in 2017, I am on a mission to find out as much as possible about the aircraft photographs still in my possession. I spent several months doing what I could about the Arado Ar196 & put that information on the pictures on my website. I have some errata to take care of there as well. I have started to do the same for the Bf109. I am about to make a massive addition (>2000 photos) and reduce the stupid # of same photos in different sizes that I have now on the website. That is a "Hangover" from my attempt to draw attention to the fact that many like photos are available online in a wide variety of sizes and quality. I am no longer caring about that whatsoever. I just want a representative photo in decent quality with as much information as I have been able to find out about that particular picture.

What do I have to add to this forum:

1. I have a tremendous amount of data in suitable formats to quickly find out things about a particular airplane. I have scoured books and the internet for this information and saved almost 1,000 documents. For example, I have the last dregs of the LEMB Stkz database & the ability to quickly search the entire database for any given item in mere seconds. This is quite helpful, because with just the Stkz there are various sources, but they do not always agree.

I have to expend a lot of energy finding out which one is correct. I can and will supply any such information readily to anyone who wants it.

2. I have specific data sets for the aircraft of the Finnish Air Force that I have put together in compact form for each of the Finnish 163 Bf109Gs.
3. I have data sets for Bf109s in Swiss AF, Condor Legion, & others.
4. As I have taken such sources, I have records of exactly where I have compiled such data or the dataset itself shows the URL of where I obtained the data. I have NOT freely circulated very much of this to anyone.
5. I have need of the members of the forum to help me find out about pilots and aircraft &/or prove/disprove my information. I am very much concerned about spreading more uncertainty in the collective knowledge out there. I have found so much wrong information already that it astounds me.

I hope that I can be of help and get help in data searches over the remaining years I have on the green side and not on the dirt side...

Thank you very much for your consideration in my membership. With my limited connectivity at my home, it has been a trial to finish this part of the forum application in the 48 hour timeframe.

Sincerely,
Rodney Larson