Lambert Fechter

Written and narrated by Dick Fechter at a cemetery walk

Lambert L. Fechter was born in Harris, Iowa in 1919. It's interesting to note the translation of the German word "Fechter" is "fighter" or "fencer" and Northwest Iowa's population has many residents with German ancestry.

At age six, he had an opportunity to examine an airplane. After that, he dreamed of flying for the rest of his life.

In 1927, his family moved to a farm two miles north of Hartley. When he was thirteen, his family moved again. This time to the Gay Hesse farm, which is located three miles north of Hartley. He received his early education in a rural school, and attended high school in Hartley, where he graduated in 1939.

While in high school, he worked part time for Fritz Van Briesen at the Sheldon airport. At that time, he was secretly taking flying lessons. He was able to keep it from his parents until it was time to solo. Since he was only sixteen, he needed parental consent to continue, so he had to tell them.

Lambert Fechter was an aviation pioneer in Northwest Iowa from 1938 until 1959. He started flying from Sheldon, Spencer and Hartley airports in Taylocrafts, Aeroncas, and a Curtiss Wright Jr. In 1940, he received his private pilot's license at Sioux City at what was then called Rickenbacker Airport. By 1941, he had earned his commercial, instructor, and secondary flight instructor ratings. During 1942, he worked at Iowa City giving flight instruction, and in 1943, he gave flight instruction to future Army and Navy pilots at Estherville and Iowa City.

Then he joined the Navy and graduated at the top of his pilot training class. During 1944 and 1945, he gave flight instruction at Norman, Oklahoma, New Orleans, Louisiana, and Dallas, Texas. He flew in many types of Navy aircraft including the Stearman.

In 1946, he started a flying service at Sutherland and then in 1948, he was an instructor at the Spencer airport. For a time, he delivered the *Spencer Sunday Newspaper* to farmers via airplane. A mail chute was installed in the window of the plane, and he delivered papers through that chute. He was noted for accuracy in getting the papers close to the front doors.

In 1942, he and Margaret Spang were married. They had three children: Linda in 1944, Dick in 1947, and Janet in 1953. In 1949, he gave up flying to become a farmer – however, that lasted only a year, and in 1950, he became a flying-farmer near Hartley. He and Bill Nagle purchased a Cessna 140 and built a hangar and runway on the farm. It seemed he had it all: family, farm, and flying.

He had many interesting experiences as a pilot. He was an executive pilot for J. R. Nylen Company in a K Model Bonanza, and frequently flew Senator Les Getting in a Tri-Pacer. He held positions as a Federal Aviation Pilot Examiner and a flight instructor for primary, commercial, and instrument flying.

He was a member of the Hartley Flyer's Club, which included: Dale Brower, Louie Brehmer, Rex Wilson, Earl Putnam, and Hewitt Grotewohl. The team rebuilt a Curtiss Pusher, a plane that looked like a canoe, with a prop behind the back cockpit. Their experiences included great times, and harrowing adventures.

He was instrumental in starting the Hartley Airport. He inspired an extraordinary number of people, including his wife, to learn to fly. Hartley became quite a flying community for a time. Some say that because of him, Hartley had more pilots per capita than any other city in the nation.

He had logged close to 10,000 flying hours before being fatally injured in an aircraft mishap in 1959. While giving instrument lessons to Glen Schipper, his plane crashed and both men lost their lives. Ironically the crash occurred near the farm his family had moved to, in 1927. The Civil Aeronautics Board was unable to determine the reason for the crash.

 In 1960, the town of Hartley rededicated and renamed its airport, Lambert Fechter Field. As Lambert Fechter's son, I still feel he is my Guardian Angel. I started flying three years after his death and have made flying my career and hobby.