
Borderline Neutrality:

The Transport of Military Aircraft Near Pembina, North Dakota, 1940

by Terry L. Shoptaugh

It has been a half century since the Second World War. Americans, more than ever before, are reflecting on that monumental time, its impact on the nation and its people. These reflections tend to be focused on the years that the United States was officially at war, 1941 to 1945. Less attention is being given to the years just before 1941, when the nation walked the line between war and peace. From the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939 to the attack on Pearl Harbor in late 1941, the American people debated the issue of neutrality. Most people wanted the United States to stay out of the war. At the same time, most also wanted the Allied powers to win. How best to achieve these two desires and whether or not these two desires were compatible were the subjects of intense and fragmenting debate. In the end, it proved to be impossible to follow a path of selective neutrality and remain at peace.

The debate had its impact in North Dakota. Here, as in the rest of the country, people desired the nation to be neutral. Because most of the state's congressional delegation took strong positions in favor of neutrality, North Dakota was commonly looked upon as an "isolationist" state. Yet, a public opinion poll taken as late as May 1941 suggested that North Dakotans were no more isolationist than the national average. Asked by the Gallup organization how they would "vote today on the question of the United States entering the war against Germany and Italy," 79 percent of those polled in North Dakota answered they would vote to "stay out." This was exactly the same as the national average.¹

North Dakota was also the site of one of the first publicized actions taken in favor of the Allies. This came to the world's attention when some unusual photographs appeared in early 1940, showing, of all things, a few airplanes being pulled by a horse team across the Canadian border near Pembina, North Dakota. These photographs brought the contrasting views of American foreign policy—strict neutrality as opposed to "aid short of war" for the Allies—into clearer focus. The dirt field separating the United States and

Canada marked a forgotten milepost on the American road to war.

North Dakotans had almost no part in the actions and decisions that led to the presence of airplanes on that field near Pembina. The first in a chain of decisions was made hundreds of miles away, in Washington, D.C. When war broke out in Europe in September 1939, many American leaders, including President Franklin Roosevelt, realized that the United States could not give any material aid to the Allies against Germany until the neutrality laws had been changed. Congress had passed a series of neutrality laws between 1934 and 1937 to prevent, the lawmakers hoped, American participation in another world war. The laws attempted to eliminate some of the reasons for which the nation had entered the conflict of 1914-1918. The neutrality laws prohibited American banks from loaning money to nations at war, lest American boys be forced to fight to secure repayments. Sales of goods, particularly armaments, to nations at war were prohibited for the same reason. To protect American lives, citizens could not travel on the ships of nations at war, and American vessels could not enter war zones.

The neutrality laws were the codified capstone of an isolationist outlook. Isolationists, those who advocated a foreign policy of strict neutrality in the event of another general war in Europe, argued that the United States could safely ignore such a war for two reasons. First, in their view, the country would have no moral reason to choose one side over another among the generally corrupt European nations. Second, the broad oceans protected the country and, with a modest navy and army, the nation could safely defend its interests in the western hemisphere without entering into alliances with other nations.²

One of the most prominent isolationists was North Dakota's own junior senator, Gerald Nye. Nye was an isolationist, a term he disliked, because he believed Americans would find nothing but trouble by becoming



Joe Wilson, a Canadian farmer, hauls a Hudson across the United States-Canadian border with a team of horses, February 1940. Courtesy of Robb Lamb, Michigan, North Dakota.

involved in international squabbles. In a journalist's words, Nye was also the essence of "American small-town life." He distrusted the cities, the sites of corporate and banking powers that threatened the independence of small farmers and businessmen. Nye "would fight monopoly and privilege with indomitable courage," Francis Brown assured his readers in *Current History* in 1935.³ Nye had entered the United States Senate in 1925 as an opponent of big business.

Although he had supported American entry into World War I while still a newspaperman, Nye changed his mind about the war in the 1920s and decided that the Great Crusade had been a fool's errand. The American boys who had died in France had, in his view, died to serve British propaganda and American business. By 1920, all hope of world peace had faded, and European

countries owed the United States millions of dollars that would never be repaid. Since he thought a future war would only lead to the same result, Nye was, by 1930, an advocate of strict neutrality. Between 1934 and 1936, he presided over the Senate investigation of the American munitions industry. Armaments manufacturers were among the corporations he most hated. To him, these "merchants of death" had helped trick Americans into war in 1917.⁴

In his speeches, Nye provided a good summary of the isolationist creed. A moderately armed America was secure on its own continent, he told his constituents. The Atlantic and Pacific oceans provided sufficient distance and insulation from all manner of weapons. Moreover, he failed to see how any one European nation was morally better than any others on the

1. *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972) Vol. I, pp. 279-280.

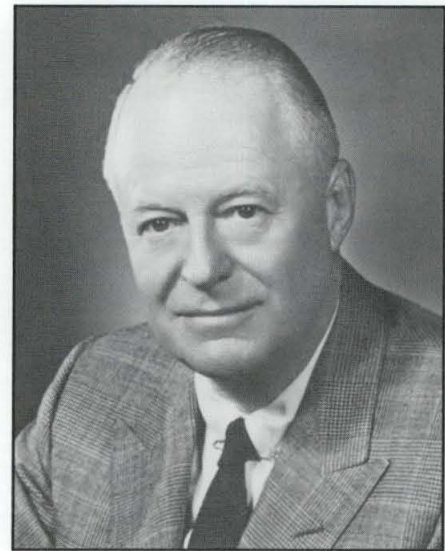
2. For isolationism and its relationship to the neutrality legislation, see: Manfred Jonas, *Isolationism in America, 1935-1941* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1966), esp. pp. 207 ff.; Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists, 1932-45* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

3. John Wiltz, *In Search of Peace* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), p. 29.

4. For background on Gerald Nye, see Wayne S. Cole, *Senator Gerald P. Nye and American Foreign Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962). Cole's previously noted *Roosevelt and the Isolationists, 1932-45* also contains a good account of the munitions investigation.



Left, North Dakota Senator Gerald Nye, a staunch isolationist, who campaigned against the cash-and-carry proposals in the Neutrality Act of 1939. Right, Robert Gross, president of Lockheed Corporation during World War II. Courtesy of Lockheed Corporation.



continent. "Saving British imperialism," he once told an audience, "isn't going to save the world." Thus, the nation could ignore the problems of the rest of the world if its people chose, and the neutrality laws of the mid-1930s were written to secure this freedom from the problems of others. The nation could, and should, leave warring nations to fester in their own violence, Nye concluded.⁵

By 1936, however, there were many Americans who disagreed with the position taken by Nye and other isolationists. They no longer believed that the oceans were wide enough to give the nation adequate shelter in troubled times. And as the troubles mounted overseas, they also insisted that the United States had some moral obligation to help Britain and France face the threat of Hitler's Germany. One of their number, the influential editor and writer Lewis Mumford, likened Nazism to "codified and coordinated barbarism ... whose deeply malignant character and cancerous spread have changed every problem of civilized political existence."⁶ Most of these opponents of an isolationist foreign policy did not want the country to go to war so much as they wanted to modify the laws to permit the United States to sell military goods to Britain and France. In short, they hoped that Britain and France might defeat Germany

with American supplies, but not American men.

Franklin D. Roosevelt agreed with this approach and, during 1937, quietly worked to convince many congressmen to amend the neutrality laws. But he lacked the votes to obtain the full discretionary power he wanted to distinguish between nations who were "aggressors" and nations who fought in self-defense. The new law, passed in May 1937, was therefore a compromise proposal. It kept most of the embargoes on arms sales and loans to nations at war, while permitting belligerents to buy other, non-military, goods on a "cash-and-carry" basis. That is, foreign nations at war could buy "peaceful" goods from American companies if they paid cash in advance and transported the goods on non-American ships.

Even though Nye and several other advocates of strict isolation voted against the 1937 compromise, it passed, partly because Congress hoped an increase in overseas sales might stimulate America's depressed economy. During 1938 and early 1939, as war loomed ever closer with Germany, France and Great Britain bought millions of dollars in military goods in the United States. But once the shooting began in September 1939, President Roosevelt was obliged to place an embargo on both sides in the conflict.⁷

The rapid collapse of Poland reawakened the debate

5. Cole, *Nye*, p. 164.

6. Charles Alexander, *Nationalism in American Thought, 1930-1945* (Chicago: Rand McNally Co., 1969), p. 179. Alexander has a good composite portrait of those writers, intellectuals, and politicians who opposed strict neutrality. Information on those who opposed isolationism is also extensive and includes portions of the works cited above. See also Selig Adler, *The Isolationist Impulse: Its Twentieth Century Reaction* (New York: Collier Books, 1961 reprint of 1957 edition), pp. 239 ff; Donald F. Drummond, *The Passing of*

American Neutrality (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1955). For Roosevelt's views on aiding the Allies, see Richard B. Ketchum, *The Borrowed Years, 1938-1941: America on the Way to War* (New York: Random House, 1989), pp. 220 ff.

7. Drummond, pp. 87-88; Cole, *Nye*, pp. 117-118, 153-164. Nye, according to Cole, voted against the 1937 act mainly because he objected to the discretionary authority it gave to the President. Ketchum provides an excellent narrative of the twisted paths of neutrality legislation in the late 1930s, pp. 125-131.

over neutrality. Roosevelt called Congress to meet in special session, and on September 21, 1939, he urged a new revision of the laws based on the cash-and-carry precedent of the 1937 act. A cash-and-carry policy for both regular and military sales, he told Congress and the press, would secure American safety more than a total embargo on arms sales. With cash-and-carry, the United States could help the Allies keep Germany from threatening American interests without risking American lives. In making this argument, the president had taken a careful estimate of the public mood. The overwhelming majority of Americans still adhered to the established policy of neutrality, but they also sympathized with the Allies against Germany. Not one person in twenty, according to a poll conducted a month after the fighting began, wanted the United States to enter the war. At the same time 82 percent blamed Germany for starting the war, and the majority of the public also favored a revision of neutrality to permit sales of all goods, including arms, to Great Britain and France—provided that these nations paid for their purchases in cash and provided their own shipping. It was on these grounds that those who supported Roosevelt's plan framed their new cash-and-carry bill.⁸

Gerald Nye fought the cash-and-carry proposal vigorously. In speeches before the Senate and on the radio, he argued that the plan would simply bring the nation closer to war. If this proposal were enacted, he warned, then true neutrality would be compromised, because the Allied navies could prevent Germany from buying and carrying U.S. goods. Nye predicted that in time the "cash" element of the new bill would be replaced by loans to the Allies. Eventually the "carry" provision too would go—and that would mean war. Many senators and representatives, especially those in midwestern agricultural states, joined Nye in resistance. After considerable debate, this "peace bloc," as they called themselves, lost the battle when the Neutrality Act of 1939, including the cash-and-carry provision, passed in November 1939. One pillar of the isolationist policy thus toppled. Enough congressmen, and enough of the public, had discerned sufficient moral difference between Germany and the Allies to sanction arms sales.⁹

Thus, by the end of 1939, Great Britain and France

could again buy weapons and other supplies, as long as they adhered to the cash-and-carry restrictions. This renewed business would have special significance for North Dakota. France and Britain had fewer airplanes than Germany, a distinct disadvantage in a modern war. Before the shooting began, British and French purchasing teams traveled to the United States to look at American aircraft models. One of the firms they visited in the early months of 1939 was the Lockheed Aircraft Company in California. Lockheed was a small but growing company and its chairman, Robert Gross, had come up with a plane he wanted the purchasing teams to look over. Lockheed had no military aircraft designs before that time, so Gross got his engineers to convert the Model 14 Electra, a two-engine airliner, into a reconnaissance plane.¹⁰

When British agents for the Royal Air Force saw the redesigned Electra, which Gross renamed the "Hudson," they were impressed with its speed, range, and bomb load. The agents, according to a company history, gave Lockheed "the largest order ever [to that time] placed with an aircraft company, 200 to 250 reconnaissance bombers at \$25 million." The British would take delivery of the Hudsons as quickly as they could be manufactured.¹¹

Very few Hudsons had been delivered to the British when the shooting began in September, so the remainder of the order was placed under Roosevelt's embargo. A month later, a Los Angeles newspaper carried a photograph of "one of the last loads of Los Angeles-made Lockheed fighting planes to reach Liverpool" before the war began. The paper commented that "Britain has millions of dollars worth of orders here now, but the planes are being stored in case the arms embargo is lifted and they can be flown to Canada for shipment to England." When the Neutrality Act of 1939 passed in November, millions of dollars worth of Hudsons, together with planes from other companies, were free to be shipped.¹²

It is noteworthy that the Los Angeles press already knew of company plans to ship the planes by flying them to Canada. Since the "carry" provisions of the new law obliged the British and French to provide their own transportation once any armaments left American territory, large purchases in the United States also placed

8. F.D. Roosevelt, "Repeal the Arms Embargo," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, October 1, 1939, pp. 738-741. Public opinion on neutrality and sales of goods to belligerents are summarized in *The Gallup Poll*, vol. I, pp. 178-188. See also Cole, *Nye*, p. 165; Jonas, p. 212.

9. Drummond, pp. 108-110; Cole, *Nye*, pp. 166-167. See also Gerald P. Nye, "Neutrality," *Representative American Speeches, 1939-1940* (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1940), pp. 53-60. The German government could also have purchased arms from the United States under the Neutrality Act of 1939, but having a sizeable lead over the Allies in weapons, especially airplanes, and lacking merchant ships

that could safely carry the goods, this was impossible, as the American public well understood.

10. Electra models had been used in the 1930s by Amelia Earhart and Howard Hughes for distance and speed flying records.

11. Roy A. Anderson, *A Look at Lockheed* (Newcomen Society in North America pamphlet, 1983), pp. 23-24. See also Douglas Ingells, *L-1001 Tri-Star and the Lockheed Story* (Fallbrook, CA: Aeropublishers, 1973), pp. 53-55.

12. "L.A. Planes Arriving in England," *Los Angeles Evening Herald and Express*, October 6, 1939.

a heavy strain on Allied merchant shipping. German submarines were already sinking ships faster than the Allies could build new ones so supplies were being lost before they reached a destination. Since the Allies needed airplanes desperately, any expedient for transporting the aircraft under their own power would not only open shipping space for other purchases, it would also prevent expensive losses.

Flying the aircraft into Canada thus made sense. But was it legal? The neutrality law would not allow the British or French to fly the airplanes themselves until after the machines left the American borders. The U. S. State Department, however, refused to allow American pilots to fly Hudsons or any other military planes directly over the Canadian border, because that would violate the "carry" restrictions of the new law, and the German government could accuse the Americans of compromising their neutral status. Could some other arrangement, then, be worked out?¹³

A solution to the dilemma was obliquely suggested by New York lawyer Allen Dulles. Dulles was a member of an old Republican family, and his brother, John Foster Dulles, was a much-quoted isolationist. But the younger Dulles was in favor of extending aid to Britain and France. He likely wrote his analysis of the cash-and-carry provision, published in the influential *Foreign Affairs* journal, at the suggestion of other supporters of the new law.¹⁴ In this piece, Dulles skillfully analyzed the new law and all of its ramifications for the future course of American neutrality. He summarized the problem facing the aircraft companies and the British buyers: "If they [i.e. airplanes sold to Britain] are dismantled and crated and title has been transferred, they can of course, go [by ship] like any other arms." But that way was slow and expensive, with many planes being lost when the ships carrying them were torpedoed. So Dulles turned to the idea of flying the planes over the Atlantic:

If they are to be flown across our [American] boundary for delivery in Canada, real difficulties are encountered. Some annoying questions might be raised if airplanes were allowed to be flown from American to belligerent soil *after* a belligerent had taken title. On the other hand, arms cannot be delivered from the United States to a belligerent, including Canada, unless title has passed. Therefore, they cannot be flown to Canada while they are still owned by the American manufacturer.¹⁵

What Dulles was saying, in effect, was that if the aircraft companies got the planes across the Canadian border by some other means than flying them, with the title transferred simultaneously, then the State Department would be satisfied and American neutrality would be intact. In the same indirect manner, he concluded his article by expressing a hope for continued American neutrality in the war, but then warned that while "we have gone very far in seeking refuge from the storm ... we cannot insure ourselves against its coming to our shores."¹⁶

In order to comply with the State Department's rules and still speed deliveries, the aircraft companies came up with a solution that met Dulles's criteria. They built aircraft landing sites along the Canadian border where the planes could be landed and then pulled across the line, transferring the title at the same time. The State Department gave its blessing to this scheme, and when the British ambassador in Washington reported the arrangement to his Foreign Office, he commented that by permitting this expedient to send airplanes quickly, the American government had "commit[ed] [it]self to some degree of obligation—not to sending boys to die in Europe, but to putting [its] vast power and resources into the diplomatic scale" against Germany.¹⁷ Encouraged, the British ordered another 110 million dollars in aircraft from the United States, including 440 more

13. In his work on *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), Robert Dallek examines Roosevelt's efforts to circumvent the State Department's inflexible interpretation of statutes and treaties in conducting foreign policy. See Dallek, esp. pp. 532 ff.

14. Leonard Mosley, *Dulles: A Biography of Eleanor, Allen, and John Foster Dulles and Their Family Network* (New York: Dial Press, 1978) has a good account of Allen Dulles's commitment to aiding the Allies, pp. 88-104. Dulles was an espionage agent in the First World War, a major figure in the OSS during the Second World War, and eventually Director of the CIA. With such credentials and extensive contacts with members of the Federal government throughout his lifetime, it is possible that he wrote his *Foreign Affairs* article at the request of someone close to either the Roosevelt White House, the British government, or both.

15. Allen W. Dulles, "Cash and Carry Neutrality," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 18 (January, 1940), pp. 187, 195. The article appeared after the

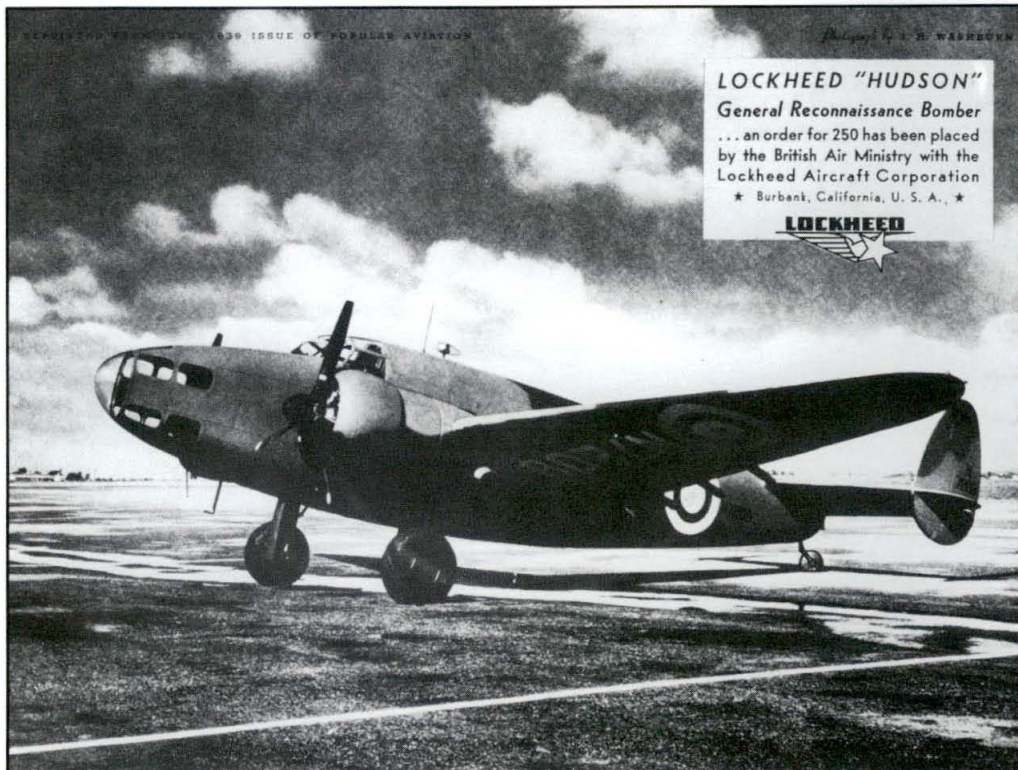
transfers began in Montana and North Dakota, but it is evident from the contents that Dulles wrote it in early November, just after the Neutrality Act of 1939 passed into law.

16. *Ibid.*

17. William R. Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988), pp. 231-235.

18. The interest of the United States military in transporting aircraft along a string of air fields is discussed in Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), esp. Chapter 4. See also W.A.B. Douglas, *The Creation of a National Air Force: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), pp. 248 ff. Both of these works document that military fliers like General H. H. Arnold were in close touch with aircraft companies and civilian airports throughout the pre-war years, so it is not inconceivable that Lockheed and other companies received military help in selecting sites for delivery of their planes into Canada.

An advertisement for the Lockheed Hudson aircraft, reprinted from the June 1939 issue of Popular Aviation. Ads like this one appeared in popular magazines throughout the war years. Courtesy of Lockheed Corporation.



Lockheed Hudsons. The United States military was also happy with the transport method, as their own air force was anxious to see if airplanes could be transported along a string of airfields across the continent.¹⁸

It was not Lockheed, but the North American Aviation Company that moved the first planes over the United States-Canadian border. North American chose the small town of Sweetgrass, Montana, for their transfer site. In late November, just days after Congress passed the Neutrality Act, North American pilots flew several single-engine Harvard training planes (usually referred to as "Texas Trainers") to Sweetgrass. A local newspaper reported that on November 20 "five war training ships" landed on a roughed-out airstrip outside the town. Then two Canadian farmers driving a pickup truck towed the planes into Canada. Ten days later, the same paper carried a photograph of the small training planes at the primitive field, and noted that the town's sheriff had to keep the "large number" of curious people away from the airplanes. Customs officials told the local editor that the delivery of the trainers "was in the nature of a trial to find a route into Canada, and that about 400 planes might be landed" at Sweetgrass if the experiment worked.¹⁹

Lockheed's executives chose North Dakota over Montana as the site for transferring their Hudsons sold to Great Britain. Their choice made sense for several reasons. The land along the North Dakota-Manitoba border was level, making it fairly easy to prepare a simple landing strip. Several Canadian Air Force air-

fields were near Winnipeg, Manitoba, so that transfer of the aircraft to Great Britain could continue efficiently. And the whole area was rather sparsely populated, which would keep the curious onlookers to a minimum.

The fact that North Dakota was home to Gerald Nye, ardent isolationist and critic of Franklin Roosevelt, made Lockheed's choice particularly ironic. Was politics in any way involved? Roosevelt seldom missed a chance to needle his political opponents, but there is no evidence to suggest that the federal government encouraged Lockheed to use North Dakota as a landing site in order to embarrass Nye. During the ensuing war years, 1942 to 1945, thousands of American aircraft were shipped to Russia and the Far East by using airfields in North Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, and other western states for the same reasons Lockheed and North American gave for these earlier transfers—northwestern states were the most practical routes from the plants in California. Also, any site for transfer of arms had to meet with the approval of the National Munitions Control Board, the federal agency which granted licenses for the export of armaments. The board's membership cut across political and ideological divisions. Finally, Gerald Nye was active in seeing that no action went beyond the letter of the neutrality laws. Although he may not have been happy with the symbolism of North Dakota being involved in arms sales that he felt were dangerous, Nye evidently did not protest Lockheed's decision, nor did he comment on the matter.²⁰

Lockheed first considered a site north and west of the



A Hudson aircraft flying over the frozen field that served as a landing strip near Pembina, North Dakota, in the winter of 1940. Courtesy of Wilton Fraser, Emerson, Manitoba.

town of Walhalla, North Dakota. The local newspaper reported on November 23, 1939, that "three Canadian officials" discussed lease arrangements for using a "level stretch" of land from farmer William Belanus. This deal never came to pass. Instead, company agents chose Pembina. Late in November, an official for Northwest Air Lines, a company with close links to Lockheed, came to an agreement with Pembina farmer George Kochendorfer to use a parcel of his land. The agents apparently told Kochendorfer that his land would become the transfer point for "six hundred airplanes" over a five-month period.²¹

In mid-January 1940, two Lockheed Hudsons left Lockheed's plant in California and traveled along a string of municipal airfields toward North Dakota. After a stop for refueling in Omaha, Nebraska, the Lockheed pilots flew the Hudsons into Pembina's airport on January 15. There, a customs agent gave them

clearance for the short hop to Kochendorfer's farm.

When the planes, which a local reporter described as "huge, black camouflaged bombers," took off again for the short jump north, someone at the airport noted that the temperature was minus twelve degrees Fahrenheit. Even that did not keep a small crowd from gathering at the farm to watch the Hudsons landing just a few yards south of the border. Several people took photographs of the planes, and a writer for the Pembina newspaper described the scene. Once the planes had come to a rest, he noted, Lockheed's pilots handed over title to a Canadian agent. Then, a Canadian farmer named Joe Wilson crossed the border with a team of horses. Wilson hooked his team to the first Hudson, its motor still idling because of the cold, and proceeded to haul it across the international boundary. There, a Canadian pilot took over and the Hudson "turned north again under its own power and took off for a Winnipeg

19. *The Shelby [Montana] Promoter*, November 23, 1939, and November 30, 1939 issues, and *The Tribune of Shelby*, November 16, 1939.

20. The use of western states for sending planes to Russia and the Far East during the war is engagingly discussed in Stan Cohen, *The Forgotten War: A Pictorial History of World War II in Alaska and Northwestern Canada* (Missoula, Montana: Pictorial Histories Publishing Co., 1981). For the operations of the National Munitions Control Board, see Murray Stedman, *Exporting Arms: The Federal Arms Exports Administration, 1935-1945* (New York: Kings Crown Press, 1947).

21. "Canadians Seek Border Site Facility to Land U.S. Planes," *Walhalla Mountaineer*, November 23, 1939; "American Made War Planes Enter Canada at Pembina," *Pembina New Era*, December 1, 1939.

22. "Deliver First Shipment of U.S. Planes to Canadian Govern-

ment at Pembina," *Walhalla Mountaineer*, January 18, 1940. The *Fargo Forum*, January 16, 1940, citing Associated Press as its source, claimed these first two planes would not go on to Britain, but were "to be used for training purposes by Canada." Stories also appeared in the Pembina and Grand Forks newspapers.

23. Charles Walker, Pembina, North Dakota, in conversation with T. Shoptaugh, January 15, 1991.

24. "Many Planes Delivered to Canada Here," *Pembina New Era*, February 16, 1940.

25. Walker, in conversation with T. Shoptaugh, related the story of the Canadian customs official. Robb Lamb's notes on Pembina contain the same story.

26. Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Complete Presidential Press Conferences of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), Vol. 15. pp. 101-102; "Neutrality Act Ruse Denied on All Sides," *New York Times*, January 27, 1940.

military airport ... A few minutes later the second bomber was hauled across in the same manner."²²

During the ensuing weeks, more Hudsons followed these two into Canada. And, with each delivery, the number of curious spectators increased on both sides of the border. As Charles Walker, a resident of Pembina who saw some of the plane transfers, recalled fifty years later, "an airplane was still a big thing to see in those days."²³ The harsh weather did not deter people from driving miles to see and take photographs of the bombers. In early February, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police detailed officers to "maintain a very close watch on the planes and the spectators to guard against any possible sabotage."²⁴

While there were no attempts at sabotage, there were some bureaucratic wrangles at the landing site. On at least one occasion, customs officials on both sides of the border argued over paperwork and proper duty charges. Also, during one landing, an American pilot bringing his plane into the field aborted his approach due to a shift in the wind. This carried the plane over into Canadian air space before the pilot came around again to land. Since the aircraft was American property until the pilot gave title to a Canadian agent on the ground, this was a technical, if understandable, violation of the Neutrality Act. A Canadian customs agent, a man

named Lendrum, was apparently anxious to avoid any claim that America's neutrality had been violated, so he reprimanded the pilot for illegally crossing the border. The men argued for a while before the incident was attributed to the weather and dropped.²⁵

Before too long, the events in Pembina were national news. The wire services picked up the local stories about the Hudsons, and stories appeared in the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and other publications. These stories gave readers a chance to see what cash-and-carry neutrality meant in practical terms. The incident between the Lockheed pilot and the customs agent, for example, apparently led to rumors in Washington, because at his January 26 press conference, reporters asked Roosevelt if some planes being sold to the British were not landing at the border as required, but instead were being flown into Canada. He assured reporters that "no American planes have been flown across the border." That afternoon a State Department spokesman told a reporter that, in keeping with the neutrality law, no British or Canadian pilots could board a Hudson or any other American-made airplane until the title was transferred at the border. No planes had crossed directly into Canada. Lockheed, the State Department source said, "observed scrupulously the [provisions of the] Neutrality Act."²⁶



A woman poses for her photograph alongside a Hudson airplane on the United States-Canadian border near Pembina, ca. 1940. Eyewitnesses to the landings reported that military aircraft were still quite novel to many area residents, some of whom are barely visible behind this plane and the other Hudson in the far right background. Courtesy of Wilton Fraser, Emerson, Manitoba.

Lockheed, pleased with the results of the first few transfers, announced plans for an extensive facility at the Pembina site. The field would be paved, buildings erected, and schedules prepared for the delivery of up to six hundred aircraft over what was currently just a dirt tract.²⁷ *Newsweek* magazine, carrying a photograph of one of the planes being hauled over the border, noted that "other American [aircraft] companies" would also be able to use the improved site for deliveries. For whatever reasons, the *Newsweek* editors captioned the photograph as "Neutrality Dodge."²⁸

These hundreds of airplanes never materialized, at least not at Pembina. The cold weather and uncertain winds hampered the transfers. Two or three planes would at times be held up at airfields further south, their pilots waiting for "any clear day" to make the last leg of the journey. Lockheed routed some aircraft further east, to a similar transfer point near the Atlantic Coast. But the vast majority of the Hudsons went by sea, out of East Coast ports.²⁹

The transfer of airplanes with horse teams ended as abruptly as it had begun. In April 1940, the German army overran Denmark and Norway; in May, they invaded France, crushing the French army in a matter of days. The French government, which was also buying American aircraft, begged the United States to allow speedier delivery of weapons. Henry Stimson, a former Secretary of State, publicly called on the government to "accelerate by every means in our power the sending of planes and other munitions to Britain and France." In response, the State Department issued a new regulation permitting "American nationals" to "travel in belligerent aircraft" over the Canadian maritime provinces. As a result, Lockheed and other aircraft companies could send their planes further east and directly into Canada. The independent Council on Foreign Relations called this ruling a step forward in the Roosevelt administration's "program of more liberal aid to Britain and France." This effectively ended the Pembina ex-

periment, but the planes arrived too late to save France.³⁰

The termination of aircraft transfers affected a few individuals in the Pembina area. Joe Wilson, the Canadian farmer, recorded in his farm ledger that from January 15 to March 31, he received ninety-nine dollars "for hauling 33 planes across the border," much less than he had hoped to earn. Another Canadian resident remembers that they had "expected big things" when the talk of a large, extensive facility was announced by Lockheed. Instead, the planes stopped coming and Lockheed abandoned use of the field.³¹

However, both the Hudson and its brief association with North Dakota became part of the popular history of the Second World War. The Hudson was a financial windfall for Lockheed. Federal government reports on arms exports during the period of January to June 1940 showed that Lockheed accounted for nearly 10 percent of all overseas arms sales. Lockheed sold more than twenty-one million dollars worth of aircraft and aircraft parts to France, Canada, and Great Britain. As much as two million dollars of this may have gone through Pembina. Licenses granted for export noted many aircraft paid for "at port of exit." The airstrip north of Pembina qualified as a port of exit.³²

Lockheed's public relations people made use of the notoriety their airplane received. In advertisements in popular magazines they quoted British fliers extolling the virtues of the Hudson: "It can bomb accurately from high-level flight, swoop down on its target for low, fast attack, strafe troop concentrations, blast tanks." Accompanying these testimonials were drawings of Hudsons, bearing British insignia, blasting German tanks and sinking Nazi submarines. The ads emphasize the efficiency of the machinery and the contributions to people in need overseas.³³

The British government also made much of the Hudson, portraying it and other purchases of American goods as symbols of American support for the Allies. Newspapers carried photographs of Hudsons arriving at British ports, often under headings like "help from

27. The Lockheed announcement appeared both locally and nationally, including the *Pembina New Era*, February 16, 1940, and the *New York Times*, January 29, 1940.

28. The photograph, credited to the *Grand Forks Herald*, appeared in *Newsweek*, February 12, 1940.

29. "War Planes Continue to Come," *Pembina New Era*, February 23, 1940. Pilots did not begin flying Hudsons to England until the fall of 1940, cf. Reader's Digest Association (Canada) Ltd., *The Canadians at War, 1939-45* (Montreal: Readers Digest Association, 1986), p. 89.

30. Henry Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service In Peace and War* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1948), pp. 318-319. The day after Stimson made his statement, Roosevelt appointed him to the position of Secretary of War. *United States Department of State Bulletin*, June 1, 1940, Vol. 2, p. 612; Whitney H. Shepardson and William O. Scroggs (for the Council on Foreign Relations), *The*

United States in World Affairs: 1940 (New York: Harper and Bros., 1941), pp. 239-243.

31. Wilton Fraser, Emerson, Manitoba, conversation with T. Shoptaugh, January 15, 1991. A photocopy of Joe Wilson's ledger entry, recording the income from hauling the Hudsons, was given to the author by Robb Lamb. The original of the ledger remains in family hands and was featured in the BBC television production, see note 36.

32. "Fifth Report of the National Munitions Control Board," published in *U.S. House of Representatives, House Document 876, 76th Congress, 3rd Session* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1940).

33. Advertising clippings for the Hudson (and the Vega Ventura, a copy of the Hudson subcontracted to the smaller Vega Aircraft Corporation) are in the Lockheed Corporate Records Center.

34. *London Times*, January 30 and 31, 1940; *New York Times*, July

Convoy of Commerce

Off shore... above coastal sea lanes... among islands... Lockheed Hudson bombers fly guard over ships that carry men and supplies to all our fighting fronts.

These vigilant sentinels are heirs of the first Lockheed Hudson—first American ship to serve with Britain's Coastal Command. In structure, they are the same tough transport design that needed few changes to become a famous bomber.

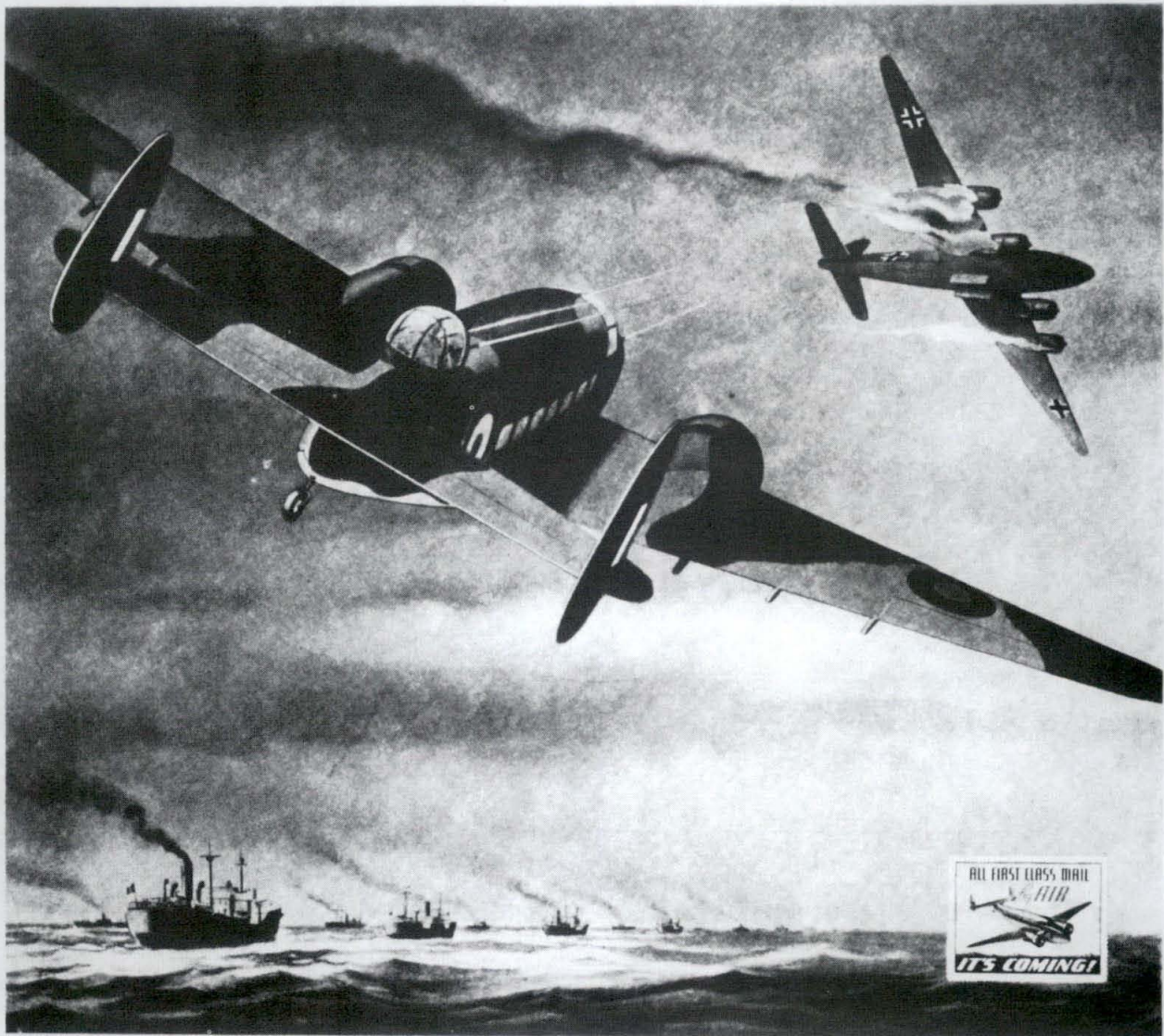
In armament, they are superior... re-armed and turreted to take full advantage of the lessons of total war.

In tradition of performance, they live up to the reputation of the Hudsons that helped perform the miracle of Dunkerque... smashing hard, smashing often, to crush our Axis foes.

**... for Protection today
and Progress tomorrow**



LOOK TO *Lockheed* FOR LEADERSHIP



Hudson Reconnaissance Bomber • Lockheed Aircraft Corporation • Burbank, California

LA 176 page Life April 27, 1942

An advertisement for the Hudson Reconnaissance Bomber, reprinted from Life, April 27, 1942. Courtesy of Lockheed Corporation.

America." British air experts lauded the ability of the airplane, calling it the "best bomber in the United States." The British Coastal Command, which used the Hudson extensively as an anti-submarine weapon during 1940 and 1941, referred to the plane as "the greatest single United States contribution to the British war effort." This effusive praise was in keeping with British policy of complimenting American aid while avoiding strident propaganda calls for American intervention.³⁴

What made this exercise in public relations all the more interesting was the fact that, privately, the British did not regard the cash-and-carry purchases to be nearly as vital as they claimed. During the summer of 1940, the new British prime minister, Winston Churchill, told a colleague that "we have really not had any help worth speaking of from the U.S. so far." In public he warmly thanked Americans for their sympathy and help, but he knew that Britain could not win the war without more American aid. Britain was running out of money. Later in the year Churchill appealed to Roosevelt for more substantial assistance, writing that "the moment approached when we shall no longer be able to pay cash for shipping and other supplies." The British press meanwhile continued to make much of supplies that did arrive.³⁵

Two documentary films later made by Britain and Canada portrayed the short-lived hauling of airplanes over the border as evidence of American support, instead of as purely business transactions. A Canadian documentary film released in 1943 includes some brief footage of a bomber being hauled over a dirt field. Since there is no indication in the press coverage of Pembina that anyone filmed the airplanes being hauled, it is likely the Canadians recreated the action for their documentary. The comment that accompanies the scene terms this a "queer" adherence to neutrality laws. British newsreels of the time likewise implied that Americans were still hampered by out-of-date neutrality laws, but increasingly eager to help the Allies. As late as 1988, a BBC television documentary included an interview with the son of Joe Wilson and still photographs of Hudsons at Pembina. The narrator of the piece comments that the United States government, supporting the fight against Hitler, had used "subter-

fuge" to effectively circumvent the "inconvenient carry clauses" of the law.³⁶

Hollywood went even further in converting the business of selling airplanes into a show of support for the Allied cause. "A Yank in the RAF," released by Twentieth Century Fox in 1941, draws upon the deliveries at Pembina for its opening scenes. A scene of airplanes on the border, one being hauled over the line, is accompanied by narration explaining that this is a way of getting around neutrality restrictions, a result of "Yankee ingenuity and a stout rope." In the film, actor Tyrone Power plays a pilot who is hired in 1940 to deliver airplanes to the Canadian border. Instead of landing on the American side of the line, he deliberately flies into Canada. The similarity of this to the incident in Pembina is obvious. Power lands his aircraft, a Hudson supplied to the studio by the Army Air Corps, at a Canadian field. When rebuked by an official for violating the neutrality arrangement, he replies that he hasn't time for such silliness, he's come to fly planes across the Atlantic to Britain. Power's character is hardly noble; at first, he is interested only in the money paid for deliveries. He later, however, joins the RAF and makes a speech for Britain's cause against Germany.³⁷

By that time, the actual incidents at Pembina had been superseded by increasing American involvement in the war. In the fall of 1940, Roosevelt ran for an unprecedented third term as president. He won at least partly because most voters felt his experience was necessary in dealing with the war that had started in Poland and had grown to engulf all of Europe. Re-elected, and again reassured by public opinion polls, Roosevelt took up Churchill's plea for more aid. He recommended to Congress a program to "lend" Britain weapons and other supplies. Congress could hardly refuse, because by this time public opinion was firmly behind Roosevelt in giving Britain every help "short of war." Thus, the Lend-Lease program, which in effect extended credit to the Allies, passed, ending the "cash" provision of the 1939 neutrality law. American companies did not lose their profits since the government paid for the supplies to England (as well as to China, and later to the Soviet Union). When this did not reverse the course of the war,

7, 1940; Philip M. Taylor, *The Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 75-77.

35. John Lukacs, *The Duel: 10 May - 31 July, 1940* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1991), p. 141; Francis Loewenheim, et al., eds., *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1975), pp. 122-125.

36. *A Thousand Days*, Associated Screen Studios, distributed by the Office of War Information [1943?], a 21-minute newsreel on Canada's war efforts, was released in 1943. A copy of the film is in the North Dakota State Film Library, Fargo. The 1988 British documentary, *An Ocean Apart*, was broadcast on Prairie Public

Television. The documentary is recapitulated in David Dimbleby and David Reynolds, *An Ocean Apart: The Relationship Between Britain and America in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Random House, 1988), esp. p. 133.

37. A review of "A Yank in the RAF" by Bosley Crowthers, appears in the *New York Times*, September 21, 1941. The author also used a taped copy of the film.

38. The steps leading to the Lend-Lease program and the arming and convoying of merchant ships are described in Drummond. See also Ketchum, pp. 572-589.

39. "[Nye] says Britain Aims to End Neutrality," *New York Times*, March 27, 1940; Ketchum, pp. 782-783; Cole, *Nye*, pp. 166, 185-221.

Roosevelt went further, and with an executive order eliminated the "carry" restrictions. American merchant ships thereafter were armed and used in convoys to deliver supplies to the British.³⁸

Gerald Nye could have taken a sort of perverse satisfaction in seeing his predictions come to pass. Cash-and-carry had failed to prevent the fall of France. Britain had run out of money before its government could buy sufficient supplies to match Germany's armies. So, as Nye had warned, the American government altered the law again to provide England with credit. As public support for defense measures developed, Congress also approved the first peacetime draft in the nation's history and, by late 1941, it was obvious that the country would soon be in the war. Nye continued to oppose all of these measures, only to see war come anyway. Most unfortunately for him, he was giving an anti-intervention speech in Pittsburgh when Pearl Harbor was attacked. This coincidence hurt him greatly, and although he supported war measures thereafter, he continued to attack the Roosevelt administration. In 1944, with Nye facing two other candidates for his seat, a bare plurality of North Dakotans turned him out of office.³⁹

But if Nye was correct in foreseeing how quickly the nation could abandon neutrality, he was wrong in believing the American people could remain apart, isolated from the events in Europe. And his opponents were wrong as well, to think that aid could be limited to selling weapons. Public support for cash-and-carry policies—and later, for Lend-Lease—was a rejection of the view that there was no moral reason to support Britain over Germany. Once people chose sides in this manner, no representative government could easily back away from a commitment to keep helping the Allies. The events in Pembina, where elaborate steps were taken to make it easier for Britain to receive American goods, was only a first step of many.

The transport of military aircraft at Pembina also provided evidence that another belief was no longer valid: the oceans could not provide enough distance to

protect America from harm. If Hudsons could be flown in stages from California to England, then it could not be long before other, perhaps hostile, bombers could fly over American soil. In December 1941, Japanese aircraft did just that, putting an end to the myths of American isolation and security.

Pembina's brief moment of world attention, then, was part of the the demise of American innocence. Neither the small town nor the great nation could remain isolated from the course of world events in modern times. ND

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