

Musick-Air Pioneer



Capt. Edwin C. Musick, Pan American's ace pilot, right, greeted at Auckland by Capt. J. Burgess, commander of Imperial Airways flying boat Centaurus. Shortly after this picture was taken Captain Musick was killed with his crew near Pago Pago.

to Pilots

By WAYNE THOMIS

N OIL SLICK heaving gently on South Pacific swells fourteen miles northwest of Pago Pago, Samoa, last Jan. 12 marked the grave of seven men and of a superb airplane, the Pan American Airways Samoan Clipper, the destruction of which apparently was the result of one of those infrequent aircraft accidents that happen despite all the forethought and preparation taken to prevent them.

It was a particularly cruel stroke of fate because it ended the flying career of Capt. Edwin C. Musick, commander of the plane, who had become the symbol of every sublimated virtue of the perfect pilot. Musick, who was affectionately known as "Uncle Ed" to his close friends, was without doubt the world's most experienced ocean pilot. He was the model to which Pan American Airways sought to mold its younger men.

If any one pilot could be said to be largely instrumental in the conquering of oceans by air, Musick was that man. Modest, precise in dress, action, and thought, with a dry Scotch humor and the ability to think with crystal clarity in situations of stress, Musick had been pioneering ocean routes for Pan American Airways since 1927 and had behind him some twenty-two years of flying.

When in 1935 he rightfully was given the Harmon trophy, which is awarded to the individual adjudged by pilots of the world to have accomplished the most for aviation in the preceding twelve months, he was one of three Americans thus honored in more than fifteen years of such awards. More significant, he was the pilot with whom Pan American crews liked best to fly. It was considered a signal honor in the company to be chosen in his flight crew.

In spite of all his honors and world fame, Musick was not well known. He was a symbol—though he would have been the first to laugh at the idea. When not flying the man loved to spend his time with his wife, Cleo, whom he adored. They really enjoyed doing simple things together. They had no children but many friends. One of their favorite diversions was driving their coupe together -and Mrs. Musick was usually at the

One of the most startling habits of Musick was that of sprinkling his

most casual remarks with what Mrs. Musick called "conversational profanity." This was entirely unconscious on his part; he meant no disrespect to his listeners when he spoke thus. It was simply a part of him.

His passion for care in every detail was equally a part of him. His clothing must be arranged exactly to suit him, although he was not in any sense a fop. Indeed, he hated to shave and often appeared in public with a twoday-old beard. But his mind demanded order in everything he touched. Mrs. Musick jested about his demand that their home be run on as definite a schedule as was the air line.

"Ed was so precise that when he came into a room he simply couldn't take a comfortable chair," said one man who knew him well. "Even if he had wanted to, he would end up by taking a straight chair. Mrs. Musick used to tell a story that he had to have exactly the same number of matches in match boxes around the house-but that, of course, was just a

Musick's idea of a vacation was to go to New York City and each day go to see a baseball game. He was a real fan. He also was fond of seeing other sports. When younger he had been an excellent squash player, but he had not been active in any sport for several years. He carefully nursed a small bald spot on the back of his head.

This spot really started the "Uncle Ed" business. He was 43 when he died and a vigorous young man. However, he had been a captain so long that he had become accustomed to being referred to as "the old man." Mrs. Musick, who always was softly laughing at and with him, usually referred to him as "my old man." They were that kind of couple.

Musick was born in St. Louis, Mo., Aug. 13, 1894, and attended grammar schools in that city. Going to Los Angeles with his family, he enrolled in Los Angeles Polytechnic school for three years, and two years thereafter attended this school at night, specializing in shop work, motors, machine work, and mechanical drawing. He was employed as an auto mechanic, but soon got a job with the Glenn L. Martin Aircraft company as mechanic. That was in 1914. A year later he had soloed and had begun a career as an exhibition pilot. With the entrance of America into the World war he became a civilian instructor at the signal corps school, San Diego. In September, 1917, he transferred to Call field, Wichita Falls, Tex., where he was regarded as specially proficient as an instructor of advanced flying.

He resigned on Aug. 28, 1918, to accept a commission as second lieutenant in the marine flying corps at Miami, Fla. After leaving the marine service in 1921 Captain Musick joined the Aeromarine Airways and began his studies in navigation. Later he became affiliated with the Mitten Air Transport, then flying between Philadelphia and Washington.

He joined Pan American in 1927 at Miami and made the first flight over the ninety miles between Key West and Havana in a Fokker trimotor. He pioneered the Caribbean routes as Pan American expanded until the line had a 32,000 - mile airway around South America. Musick was chief pilot all the way. While flying there he made 1,000 trips between Miami and Latin American ports.

The army air corps news letter, commenting on Musick, says: "Credit also is generally given to Captain Musick for completing the education of the Pan American Airways first line pilots. His reports indicated that he was more than an airplane pilot. He was an expert navigator, scientist, meteorologist, and, most of all. an economist. One Pan American official declared that Musick never once made an impracticable suggestion or recommendation. He aided in establishing a safety record for his air line claimed in some quarters to be unequaled by any other air line in the world."

Musick was pioneering when he met his death. He had made one preliminary voyage from Honolulu to Auckland, N. Z., during the summer, as the photographs reproduced here indicate. He was on the second voyage with an express cargo aboard when the accident occurred.

