



Hans Mueller

April 21, 1925 – December 30, 2005

Hollis “Hans” Eugene Mueller and Hawaiian Air Tour Service (HATS)

The following pages have been compiled from various writings about Hans and HATS along with some of my comments. My comments are not to disparage the character of anyone but share my views and observations while working at Honolulu Int’l. Airport.



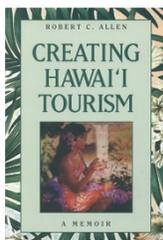
To tell the story of HATS, I need to start with **Lloyd Osbourne**. Lloyd was born in Newtonville, Massachusetts on March 14, 1909. During his time at Yale University, he obtained a degree in mechanical engineering, He also was the captain of his swim team. He passed on the 1932 Olympic try outs to enlist as a Naval Aviator. After earning his wings in 1933 at Pensacola, Florida, Lloyd piloted landings and take offs from the world’s first aircraft carrier, the US Langley, a converted Navy oiler.

Following a stint in the engineering design department at Martin Aircraft, he joined Pan American Airways as a pilot, flying throughout the Caribbean and South America; one of his passengers was President Franklin D Roosevelt.

His WWII duty included command of an air control unit during amphibious operations at Saipan, Tinian, and Iwo Jima, for which he earned two combat Bronze Star medals. He later served on the staff of Admiral Chester Nimitz, Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet.

After WWII, a unique type of air service called ‘flight seeing’ came into being. On April 2, 1946, Osborne started Hawaiian Air Transport Service Ltd, “a deluxe charter and tour service.” It provided non-scheduled service to all Territorial airports and provided special tourist sight-seeing flights to the Neighbor Islands, and charter services as required. After operating for about 4-years, Hans Mueller took over the certificate and expanded that operation into Hawaiian Air Tour Service (HATS,) a full-fledged flight-seeing operation.

Lloyd continued as a Honolulu business executive which included the start-up of the Ala Moana Center along with other notable Hawaii and Pacific projects.



The article below comes from Robert Allen’s book “Creating Hawaii Tourism.”

Hawaiian Air Tour Service

During the early 1950s, a unique type of air service came into being called "flight seeing." Much of the grandeur of the Hawaiian Islands could be seen only from the air, and the new service would allow the average tourist to take pictures, enjoy looking down into the unique volcanic craters, and marvel at the geometric patterns of the pineapple fields. Thus entered the enigmatic Hans Mueller into the aviation and tourist picture by taking over the original Hawaiian Air Tour Service (HATS) certificate, started by Olin Andrews and Lloyd Osborne, and expanding it into a full-fledged flight-seeing operation with modern aircraft.

Mueller, a man of many talents, was probably the most qualified individual in the then fledgling Air Taxi system, which provided a much-needed supplementary service that the large local carriers could not provide. A highly qualified pilot, Mueller obtained his basics at an early age when he was singled out of his high school class to work as a civil employee with the National Advisory Commission of Aeronautics at Langley Field. At Langley he worked in the electronics lab and the supersonics tunnel. Asked if he would like to become an aviation cadet, he said yes and entered the U.S. Air Force class at Randolph Field, where he trained and later took his discharge.



Hans Mueller, owner, Hawaii Air Tour Service.

During the Korean War he reentered the air force training program and was assigned to the Military Air Transport Service (MATS) as an air commander in C-54 aircraft. Training and flying in the Arctic region of Greenland and Toure Bay, he also flew into Europe, including England and France. In 1951 he was assigned to Honolulu, with Hickam as his base, and he covered the entire Pacific.

With this background, Mueller put together a unique air service unparalleled in the world. It was an aerial-tour first. His original fleet consisted of two Cessna model T-50 aircraft. These were followed by six eleven-passenger DeHavilland Doves. It soon became apparent, however, that more planes would be needed to handle the ever-increasing business. Added to the fleet were three four-engine DeHavilland type seventeen-passenger Heron aircraft, which were ideal for sight-seeing. With a fleet of eleven planes, HATS was becoming a factor in the air tour and taxi business—so much so that the two major interisland carriers complained to the CAB that HATS was infringing on their rights. The complaint was thrown out, and HATS continued with its unique service, eventually operating sixteen planes, including two 44-passenger Fokker F-27s. The tours became more sophisticated and included stops on three islands, local sightseeing and meals included—in other words, a complete package.

HATS operated successfully for more than twenty years with an impeccable record for service and safety. In a manner of speaking, it was the bureaucracy that finally put the company out of business. The CAB ordered that HATS double the time spent on engine overhauls of its planes. Although the company had always gone beyond the minimum standards in maintenance of its planes and had one of the best safety records in the world of aviation, the government agency said it would have to comply with the new requirements, which would have doubled maintenance costs and made them prohibitive.

Mueller, a man of strong principles, resisted the order and took the government to court in a suit that lasted for several years. He finally won, but by that time he had shut down the airline rather than comply with what he deemed a discriminatory and unnecessary policy. The closing of HATS was a loss to the visitor industry and an example of government bureaucracy at its worst.

Hans Mueller was one of the visitor industry pioneers. He participated in all of the organizations that fueled Hawai'i tourism, attended American Society of Travel Agents and PATA meetings even after the close of his airline, and continued to support the Hawaii Visitors Bureau.

HATS not only had its issues with the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) (*abolished 1985*), but it was my understanding that Hans Mueller also had a unique agreement with the State of Hawaii, Department of Transportation, Airports Division regarding his airport lease. The lease was for a parcel of land on the south ramp off Lagoon Drive. The terms were to be for 50 years and

instead of a cost per square foot, Hans negotiated the long-term lease to be a percentage of his gross income. When HATS was flying its tours, the gross receipts were enough to satisfy both Hans and the state. When HATS stopped flying, they had no income, and zero dollars went to the state... for years. Hans remained in the building with HATS aircraft parked at the facility. The aircraft continued to be maintained by a staff of three. Maintained but not flown.

When I agreed to assist Seagull Air Hawaii with the FAA Part 135 certification in 1983, I knew I needed to talk with Hans Mueller. I understood the ins and outs of FAA certifications, but I was new to the de Havilland Heron. HATS still maintained their approved repair station license and it was that expertise that was needed to gain FAA approval for Seagull Air Hawaii.

There was some reluctance with Hans taking on Seagull Air Hawaii. That meant income and he had to figure out how that may affect his position. Even though he maintained his aircraft he knew he would not fly again. The aircraft were airworthy but maybe not so marketable. The Seagull Air Hawaii's Heron was an updated Riley conversion that used newer engines (Lycoming IO-540) with an updated, pleasing interior. I believe that Hans wanted to take on Seagull Air Hawaii to regain some involvement in the business once again. For quite a while, Hans Mueller's day to day was battling various authorities.

We brought Seagull Air Hawaii's N415SA into the HATS hanger and got started. The staff was a pleasure to work with. "Hiro" was with HATS for many years and knew every aspect of this incredibly unique aircraft. Mike Willet was another member of the HATS team that helped expedite the certification. We not only inspected every aspect of the aircraft but needed to ensure that various components had proper overhaul certification. When I could not find proper documentation, the part would be removed and replaced. HATS being a certified repair station had approval to certify specific components. Each time I needed a part or a specific repair, I needed to negotiate with Hans. It was painful and time consuming. I could arrive in the morning to find that he did not want to continue the relationship but with a little persuasion we would be back on again.

HATS had one of the largest inventories of Heron parts in the world. Puerto Rico International Airways, PRINAIR held the other inventory which was moved to Opa-locka, Florida after they discontinued their flying operations. I developed a relationship with them as well because Hans's prices sometimes were extreme. A special, almost one-of-a-kind, item would be on his shelf, maybe two and he would not want to let it go in case he starts flying again. I would in turn go to PRINAIR and get it and he would be upset that I went elsewhere.

I remember when I decided to replace the windows in the aircraft. The plexiglass over time became crazed (*network of fine surface cracks*), not an airworthy concern but difficult to see through. This was a tour airplane not a cargo airplane, so they needed replacing. Hans would sell me new windows from his stockroom but wanted to buy back mine. He said they are better than the ones in his airplane, he would not have replaced them. It is one thing to be frugal, another to be impractical.

I was still incredibly pleased with the work accomplished and we were able to secure the FAA Part 135 certification in a matter of 4 to 5 weeks.

The main pilot for Seagull Air Hawaii was Kim Hunter. He seemed to be knowledgeable to take on the role as Director of Operations and assist with the FAA certification even though he did not have a lot of hours as “pilot in command” on a de Havilland Heron. Once we completed the full inspection and refurbishing of the N415SA, it required a flight test. We had removed and replaced propellers, engine components, control surfaces, landing gear components and more and I was confident of the work accomplished and to show to that confidence I added my name to the flight test crew.

I asked the crew to ensure that their weight & balance computations were thorough, the Heron center of gravity (c.g.) always need to be spot on. You would load passengers from the rear forward to ensure an accurate center of gravity. I asked how much weight I should add in the most aft baggage component for the test flight. They gave me a number and we loaded the ballast. I took a seat in the rear of the aircraft and we headed out to the runway. As we rolled out, the aircraft took more runway than it should have. When the pilot pulled back on the yoke, we became airborne... sort of. As we gained altitude, instead of looking down the aisleway into the cockpit and seeing blue sky, I was looking at the ground below. The c.g. was way off, and I immediately jumped from my seat in the rear of the aircraft and went into the rear baggage compartment as far as possible. My 150 lbs. in the back were enough to give the aircraft a better attitude. The aircraft returned to the field and once on the ground and parked, I gave the pilot some choice words. I asked him to redo his weight & balance again and let me recheck the numbers. We put the required increased ballast in the rear and went back up for a full test flight which went well with all aircraft operations meeting proper standards. Next step, FAA proving flights so Seagull Air Hawaii could meet certification. Back to HATS...

Now that we are flying, we still needed to maintain our HATS relationship even though it was difficult to know from day to day if it would continue. My time was divided between Rainbow Islands Cargo (*VP/Director of Maintenance*) where I just completed their FAA certification and Seagull Air Hawaii (*Director of Maintenance*). As Rainbow Islands Cargo (*Beech 18 / DC3*) operations increased, we hired additional personnel and I started training the mechanics on the Seagull Air Hawaii's de Havilland Heron. I started to accumulate additional spare parts as well. The HATS relationship always being an unknown, I wanted to be prepared for the day we were no longer working together.

Hans seemed to be getting more difficult to work with. I remember I would meet Hans at his Diamond Head home on occasion. He had a beautiful home, an island classic. I would come to the house to drop off a requested payment or sit to discuss airport operations. I would always recognize Hans personal attire as being less than professional. Was he frugal or eccentric? His aloha shirts were worn out with holes. His socks would have holes as well as his shoes.

As we talked, he would have his shoes in the kitchen oven, while he cut out cardboard inserts for the shoes for when they were dry. His black Cadillac was twenty years old and always seeming to require some work. The man was a millionaire, but the image was far less.

It came to a point that it was too difficult to continue to have Hans and HATS involved with Seagull Air Hawaii. All the maintenance was moved to Rainbow Islands Cargo. Hans was upset with this decision but he seemed to be upset with any decision so we will have to make the best of operating the Heron without HATS.

I continued with Seagull Air Hawaii for a few months which included a trip to the mainland to find an additional aircraft (*see story posted*). New owners were coming on board and I looked to move on. Seagull Air Hawaii continued for some months before closing.

After Seagull Air Hawaii, I worked at South Pacific Island Airways as a flight engineer on their Boeing 707's and was Superintendent of Maintenance for the Part 135 Twin Otter operations in Guam and Pago Pago, American Samoa. I worked for SPIA for a couple of years and those years did not have me on Lagoon Drive or the south ramp. It was not until early 1986 when I took on a new role at Hemmeter Aviation that I got reacquainted with Hans. Some would consider Hans the Mayor of Lagoon Drive. He still did not have business which meant that he did not have income which meant the State of Hawaii was still not getting a penny, but it gave Hans plenty of time to visit everyone on Lagoon Drive. He was always on reconnaissance for information.

Around 1994, Hawaiian Air Tour Service lease was ready to expire, and the DOT-Airport was ready to act upon the long awaited take over. When the day came, they took possession of the building and all its contents as well as the aircraft. After nearly fifty years, Hans had no facility at the airport to go to each day. The big black Cadillac still came to the airport and made visits along Lagoon Drive. His ragged look continued with his white hair growing down below his shoulders. His appearance and demeanor had him being compared to Howard Hughes.

The HATS aircraft were relocated to a vacant lot where potential buyers tried to negotiate with the state but the longer it took, the more they deteriorated and eventually most were scrapped. As the new century approached, it was clear that the de Havilland DH-114 Herons had seen their day.

In 1998, Bob Yosaitis and I started Bradley Pacific Aviation and Hans would drop by every once and awhile to gather his intelligence. I liked talking with Hans. It seemed that we did better when it did not involve doing business together. I did not know or exactly understand how he came to be the **way** he was, but I did understand **who** he was. Hans Mueller was an aviator, an entrepreneur, a man that help shape the air tour business for many years... for that I am glad that I got to know him.