

**Karl D Stoltzfus Sr**

---

**From:** Karl D Stoltzfus Sr  
**Sent:** Monday, January 29, 2018 10:36 AM  
**To:** Sarah Conner  
**Subject:** FW: Columbine II and Christler Family Connection  
**Attachments:** The Columbine II and Christler Family Connection.docx

**From:** Lockie Christler [mailto:lchristler@hotmail.com]  
**Sent:** Sunday, April 10, 2016 3:38 AM  
**To:** Karl D. Stoltzfus, Sr. <kstoltzfus@dynamicaviation.com>  
**Subject:** Columbine II and Christler Family Connection

Hi Karl,

Attached " Columbine II and Christler Family Connection " edited by Becky and Brandi.

Those two keep me on my toes.

Lockie

---

This email has been scanned by the Symantec Email Security.cloud service.  
For more information please visit <http://www.symanteccloud.com>

---

## The Columbine II and Christler Family Connection

In the winter of 1969, Mel Christler, owner of Christler Flying Service Inc., was contemplating what type of aircraft would be best to acquire for upcoming government fire ant contracts to add to his aerial application Ag business. It just so happened that during that spring, five U. S. Airforce Surplus C-121A Lockheed Constellations came up for bid in May of 1970. They were located at Davis- Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, AZ. My brother-in-law, two mechanics and I loaded up in the company Mooney to head to Tucson to meet my father to go look at the Connies during the pre-bid viewing period. Dad was happy with what he saw even though they were missing various parts and the flight engineers' entire engine instruments were cannibalized with the wiring just cut and cannon plugs missing. Fortunately, Dad saw a for sale ad in Trade-A-Plane advertising Constellation parts with the inventory needed for the missing items. Well, Dad bid all-or-none on the lot of five C-121A's and was awarded the bid even though someone had a high bid on just one of the C-121A's. We were unaware at the time it was Columbine II. Why did the Air Force let a Presidential airplane go to auction?

We knew that the C-121A's were VIP airplanes and that the Air Force had purchased 10 consecutive serial numbered Constellations (civilian Lockheed Constellation Model L-749). We heard that one of them was General MacArthur's. We weren't too interested in their history at that time as we were anxious to get them airworthy and spraying. They went into storage in 1968. The Connies were towed off of the Air Force Base to a nearby salvage yard. We hired a local company to get the first Connie airworthy and ready to ferry to Twin Falls, ID which took 6 months and a lot of money back then. The Air Force would not let us take off from the Air Force Base so we had to use a 1700 foot gravel road. Being lightly loaded, the 10,000 horse powered Connies had no problem getting air borne. The runway sure looked short from the cockpit though.

That first Connie went to Twin Falls, ID to be converted for fire ant work. Pete Lazarus (a friend of Dad's who put the turbine Viscount engines on the B-17 air tanker for Ray and John Elgin) installed a hopper and augers for the fire ant dispersal material. The Connie got approved by the government and soon after Dad was awarded a fire ant contract. We needed two more Connies quick. This time Dad took our own crew and got two airplanes out of DM in six weeks. Dad flew them to our home base in Thermopolis, WY to be converted to spray rigs. The interiors were completely removed for weight savings. After a few years the large aircraft fire ant work was shut down. We then picked up spruce bud worm jobs in Quebec, Canada and needed four Connies for the job. Again, we needed to get the fourth airplane out of Tucson in a hurry. While the other three were being converted from dry chemical to liquid in Casper, WY, Dad and I loaded up the pickup with tools and headed for Tucson with a side stop in Alamogordo, NM to visit his long time friend Arnold Kolb, owner of Black Hills Aviation. Army loaned us five of his good mechanics and we got the fourth Connie out in two weeks. We flew it to Casper for the conversion and off to Quebec, Canada we went. We sprayed a million acres in six weeks. Around the end of June we headed back to the U. S. and picked up mosquito, grasshopper and range caterpillar

spray jobs. We even sprayed sixty four towns on the Island of Puerto Rico, four times a piece, for dengue fever with one DC-3 and one Connie. I have a newspaper picture of the Connie flying between two twenty story buildings at about the 10<sup>th</sup> story, and we were legal! We also had a double engine change on the Connie through the ring not a QEC (quick engine change).

By now we had removed all four engines from the fifth Connie to keep the other ones working. The reason we never picked the fifth Connie to be a sprayer was because the Air Force had replaced the right main landing gear with a L-1049 main landing gear. The L-1049 was a stretched, heavier and higher horse powered Constellation. 1980 rolled around and by now Dad had sold four of the working Connies. One went to a freight operator in Santa Domingo hauling produce in the Caribbean and later went in the ocean about a mile short of the airport at St, Thomas, V.I. The other three were sold to a Canadian spraying company in Quebec. The Canadian government wanted their own people to own the sprayers. One of which John Travolta bought and eventually became Vern Rayburn's Mats Connie and is now in a museum in Korea. Another is in a museum in Holland. The third one was destroyed in a landing accident on the spraying contract in Quebec, CA.

It wasn't until ten years after we had purchased the five Connies, when Robert Mikas, curator of the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, contacted my father telling him we had **Columbine II, WOW!!** Now what were we to do with that kind of information? We couldn't scrap the airplane. Now that we knew that the remaining Connie was President Eisenhower's, Dad felt bad that we had taken the engines off it. In 1985, while I was living in Tucson flying for Gates Learjet Mom and Dad came to visit me. Coincidentally, Globe Aviation was having an auction in Mesa, AZ. One of the aircraft up for auction was a sister ship of the Connies we owned. As Dad and I were leaving to go to the auction, Mom pointed her finger at me and looked at me with "the look" and said, "Lockie don't let your Dad buy that airplane". Talk about being between a rock and a hard place! Sure enough, Dad was high bidder. I was really excited but dreading going home that night to face Mom but eventually she accepted the fact that Dad just purchased the Connie. Fortunately, Dad was smart enough to get that Connie. The newly acquired Connie came with a number of spare engines that were off of TWA Connies. We were able to get Tom Woodward and his brother Randy to come in with us on the sister ship in hopes of getting it ready for the grasshopper spray season but ran out of time and money. To save on travel time back and forth between Tucson and Meza, we had moved the engines to Ryan Field west of Tucson to prep them to install on the sister ship for the ferry flight from Meza to Ryan Field. The owners of Ardco (they operated DC-4 air tankers) were friends of ours from Greybull, WY and let us use their facilities at Ryan Field to work on the engines. That is where we became acquainted with Henry (Harry) Oliver who is a real gentleman and became a good friend. Dad tried for a number of years to get someone to buy or partner with us on the Columbine II to restore her. A number of museums wanted her but wanted us to donate it. We had a lot of money tied up in it over the years and didn't have a tax problem. The summer of 1989, Harry Oliver and his wife Barbara were in Greybull to visit their daughter. Harry called Dad to see if he wanted to meet for coffee. Harry asked Dad what he was going to do with Columbine II. By this time, Dad was pretty down in the dumps about being able to raise interest in Columbine II and told Harry he was probably going to have to scrap it. Harry said, "we can't let her be turned into beer

cans". Fortunately, Harry had the foresight and financial wherewithal to partner with us to restore Columbine II.

During November 1989, Harry, Dad, my cousin Cory Brummond and friends of Dad and Harry and Harry's son Doug started prepping Columbine II for a ferry flight from Davis-Monthan to Ryan Field. Harry bought out Tom and Randy Woodward of their major share of the sister ship Connie we got out of Meza. We used it to restore Columbine II. The Columbine II Inc. business was formed with Harry Oliver, Mel Christler, Tom Woodward, Cory Brummond and I as shareholders. The first part of April 1990 we ferried Columbine II from Davis-Monthan Air Force Base to Ryan Field. This time the Air Force let us use the long paved runway on the base. Restoration work continued. The Eisenhower Foundation contacted Dad and Harry and asked if we would fly Columbine II to Eisenhower's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration in Abilene, KS in October 1990. As it turned out we were able to make it to that important event. We flew locally around Tucson for about 10 hours and worked all the bugs out of it and took check rides from the FAA to get the crew current and legal to carry passengers. En route to Abilene, we stopped in Santa Fe to pick up Harry's wife and a couple friends, did a fly over at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs at their request, stopped in Denver to pick up Dad and then onto Salina, KS. The day we went to Abilene we stopped in Wichita, Manhattan, Topeka and Hays, Kansas to let people tour the Connie. While in Abilene people would stand in line for two hours to get a look inside. President Eisenhower's son along with President Eisenhower's pilot, Colonel Draper's second wife and daughter got to visit the Columbine II. It was a very emotional time for them.

Other events we flew Columbine II to were Andrews Air Force Base for an air show and NBAA in Houston, TX for Harry's brother Bucky. Over the years Columbine II was stored at Ryan Field; Tucson, AZ; Roswell, NM and Santa Fe, NM. In 1998, we flew Columbine II to Scottsdale, AZ for an auction but the reserve bid was not met. In 2003, the Columbine II was flown to Marana Regional (Avra Valley airport) to be stored next to Vern Rayburn's Mats Connie (sister-ship) in hopes it would draw more interest for someone to purchase it. At one point we were close to making a trade with the Smithsonian for some C-130's, hoping to get back into the firefighting business, but that fell through when our contact Mr. Engen passed away in a glider accident.

In 2013/2014, my nephews Tim and Brett Crowley were involved in getting the word out that we were looking for a new home for Columbine II. Thanks to Steve Miller, Marana Regional Airport Manager, for all his support and time dealing with all the people interested in the Connie. Some of it made the aviation magazines. Tim and Harry made a video, The first Air Force One, that went on You Tube and as of today has 1,709,154 views.

Around October 2014, Karl Stoltzfus, Dynamic Aviation, made contact with us. Harry and Karl came to a mutual agreement. In March of 2015, Karl and his crew met us at Marana Regional Airport north of Tucson to look at Columbine II and to start a pre purchase inspection. After a few months of inspecting and replacing a lot of Aeroquip hoses, among other needed repairs to run the engines, Karl decided to purchase Columbine II. From the very beginning, Karl and his team did everything the right way, the pre purchase agreement, the purchase agreement and the maintenance performed on the plane. And it showed; the test flight went as planned! The flight from Marana Airport to Mt. Pleasant, TX and onto

Bridgewater, VA was uneventful, just the way we like it! Not bad for an airplane that had not been flown since 2003. I had a good feeling about Karl from the first time we spoke. We have a lot in common; Karl grew up in the agriculture spraying business as did I. I know my mother and father would be proud that their Connie is finally home where she belongs. She even has a new hangar being built. We are so fortunate to be associated with Harry and Barbara Oliver, Karl and Michael Stoltzfus and their Dynamic Aviation team (Brian, Roco, Kevin, Brad, Aaron, Dan and the rest, sorry I'm terrible at remembering names) along with Scott Glover and his Mid America Flight Museum team.

I am so honored and privileged to be part of the team on Columbine II and to fly President Eisenhower's First Airforce One. We had a great team flying the Connie. Tom Woodward and Tim Coons were the flight engineers and Scott McDonald, co-captain. Tim Coons helped enormously with his extensive Connie knowledge during the year's preparation. Tom, Scott and I have crewed together in the past as we sprayed at 150 feet agl. Tom and I have had the honor of crewing Columbine II for all of its flights, except the flight from Santa Fe to Marana in 2003, since the first flight getting it out of the boneyard in April 1990, to delivering it to its new home in Bridgewater, VA. Harry and Cory were crew members up until 2003 also. Thanks to Karl for including my wife, son and sister-in-law on his King Air chase plane for the once in a life time flight from Marana Airport to Mt. Pleasant to Bridgewater alongside Columbine II. Also thanks to Scott Glover and his Mid America Flight Museum team photo flight from Marana Airport to Mt. Pleasant with their B-25.

I am so grateful to my parents to have had the opportunity to grow up around working airplanes like the DC-3 and Constellations. For a man that only had an eighth grade education, Dad instructed pilots during World War II, flew the Hump hauling av gas in C-109's (tanker version of the B-24), co-owned Christler and Avery Aviation which operated 20 aircraft including PB4Y2's, B-25's, Twin Beech's, a Northrup Delta, a B-18 and five piston helicopters, flew a Jet Commander for an oil company in Wyoming, formed Christler Flying Service Inc. which operated seven DC-3's for spraying and hauling smokejumpers and five Lockheed Constellations spraying large acreage. Having been taught to fly from a man like Dad is absolutely priceless.

The Constellation flies as good as it looks in the air. It does take a little bit of time getting the feel of the hydraulically boosted controls, however.

I have often wondered why we ended up as the caretakers of this great bird Columbine II, but I wouldn't trade the experience for anything. It is bitter sweet to let her go after all these years but we pass the baton knowing she is in the caring hands she deserves.

Lockie Christler

April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016