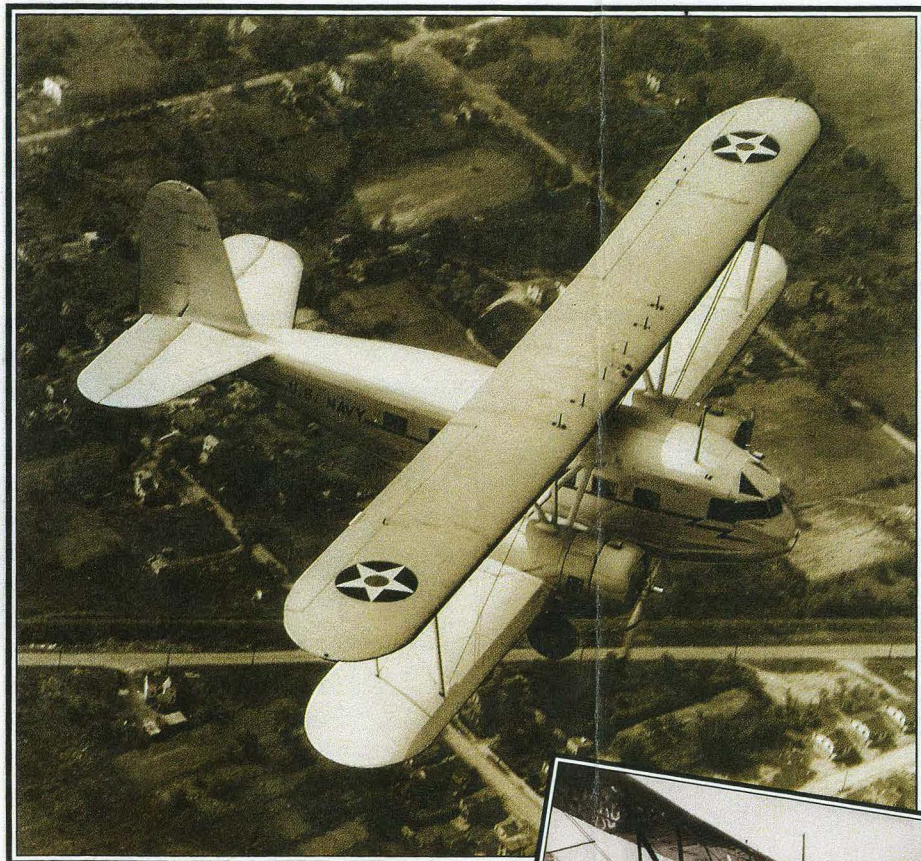


CURTISS

## CONDOR II

● 1930s biplane airliner ● Overseas service ● Antarctic pioneer



▲ *Condor IIs were destined to have a very short history in US airline service. However, overseas airlines and Antarctic explorers soon put the aircraft to work elsewhere.*

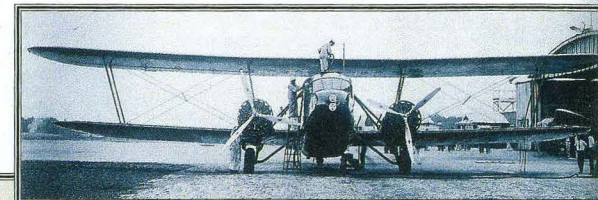
At first sight the T-32 Condor II appeared to be an anachronism – a new biplane transport at a time, in the early-1930s, when the all-metal monoplane was the way of the future. Curtiss-Wright, however, had seen a niche in the market for a ‘stop-gap’ aircraft that offered performance improvements over contemporary designs, pending the arrival of the truly advanced Boeing 247 and Douglas DC-2, then under development.

## PHOTO FILE

## CURTISS CONDOR II

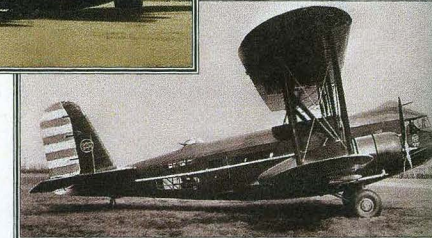
## ▼ On floats in Colombia

Seen here on floats prior to delivery, this BT-32 operated as a transport from rivers in Colombia and flew Atlantic anti-submarine patrols during World War II.



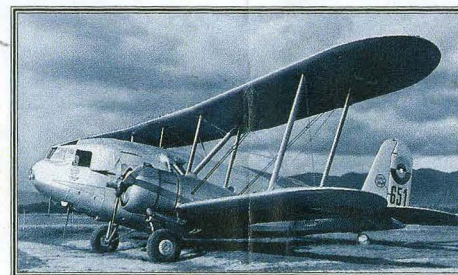
## ▲ Design advances

Although cheap to produce the Condor II introduced new features, including zip-fastened panels for easy maintenance. The batteries could also be changed in less than a minute.



## ▼ Military sales

There were just four T-32s in US military service. Overseas sales, however, were made in Colombia (below) and Argentina.



## ▲ Chinese bomber

This, the first military Condor II, flew in 1934 and was immediately demonstrated to the Chinese. After repairs following a landing accident it became the personal transport of Chiang Kai-shek (the head of Chinese central government).



## ► Airline service in America

The Condor II's use as an airliner in the US was shortlived as more advanced types like the Douglas

## FACTS AND FIGURES

- In all, only 45 Condor IIs were built, including a prototype, 28 airliners, 15 military aircraft and one survey machine.
- Swissair's sole AT-32 was the first airliner in Europe to carry a stewardess.
- The three Condor IIs used in the Antarctic were fitted with floats or skis.
- In the late 1930s a Canadian railroad company used a Condor based in Alaska to reach isolated Yukon communities.
- The last operational Condor II was used by the Peruvian air force until 1956.
- Four ex-Eastern Air Transport T-32s served as cargo aircraft in England in 1937/38.

PROFILE

# Last of the US biplane airliners

Curtiss-Wright's St Louis factory had been closed for two years by the great depression and the company needed an aircraft with which to resume production. It had to be developed cheaply and quickly. The result was the XT-32 (Experimental Transport to carry a payload of 7055 kg (3,200 lb.)), the first of which flew on 30 January 1933. The name Condor II was adopted to cash in on

the solid reputation of the earlier Model 18 Condor, which it resembled in basic layout. Among the T-32's innovative features was an electrically-retracted undercarriage, flexible engine mounts (to reduce vibration) and even hot and cold running water in the toilet. Eastern Air Transport and American Airways placed orders. By the end of 1935, however, the Condor II was

Two Condor IIs were purchased by the US Navy in 1934 for transport duties. Both were lost in the Antarctic.



## AT-32-B CONDOR II

American Airways bought Condor IIs to replace the smaller Ford Trimotor. However, the Trimotor was to outlive the Condor IIs, the last of which was retired by AA in 1937. NC12394 was destroyed in a hangar fire in July 1937.

being replaced with DC-2s. Ultimately, Condor IIs saw a great deal more service overseas. Bomber (BT-32) and transport (CT-32) versions were sold in South America and US civil and Navy examples made pioneering survey flights over the Antarctic.



The engines were mounted on rubber bushes to reduce vibration. To ease maintenance Condor IIs had no less than 125 access panels, closed with zip fasteners.

The T-32's simple design and Curtiss-Wright's efficient management allowed the company to offer the aircraft to US airlines at a comparatively cheap price, quoted as 'less than \$60,000'.

The AT-32-A was a convertible dayplane/sleeper aircraft with capacity for 12 passengers. The AT-32-C carried 15 passengers in a dayplane-only configuration; other models had engines of varying horsepower ratings. American Airlines was the biggest customer for the A-model with 10 examples.

Passenger comfort was an important selling point for the T-32. The cabin was soundproofed and each seat was provided with individual hot and cold air outlets. Cabin furnishings were composed of a combination of fabric and leather.



Two Wright SGR-1820 Cyclone geared radial engines powered early T-32s. The improved AT-32 used a supercharged variant driving a variable-pitch propeller.

The electrically-retracted undercarriage was the first to be used on a twin-engined airliner and was among a number of innovations that set the Condor apart from other airliners of the period. The airframe, however, retained a metal structure and fabric skin.

## ACTION DATA

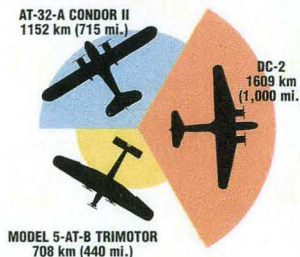
### CRUISING SPEED

Despite being a twin-engined biplane, the AT-32 had almost a 50-km/h advantage over the three-engined Trimotor monoplane. The DC-2 showed an even better turn of speed, setting new standards in airliner performance.

AT-32-A CONDOR II	245 km/h (152 m.p.h.)
TRIMOTOR	198 km/h (123 m.p.h.)
DC-2	306 km/h (190 m.p.h.)

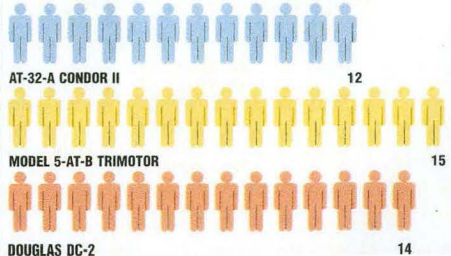
### RANGE

The Condor II's range was also an improvement over that of the Trimotor, despite being considerably heavier. This was largely due to its twin engines, which used less fuel than the Ford's three powerplants. Once again, the DC-2 set new standards.



### ACCOMMODATION

Early model Condor IIs carried fewer passengers than the Trimotor, but could be flown in a sleeper/dayplane configuration. Later AT-32 variants could carry 15 passengers, more than the first DC-2s.



## From the Americas to Antarctica

**ANTARCTIC PIONEER:** The first Condor II on the southern continent accompanied Admiral Byrd's second expedition.

**ARMY TRANSPORT:** There were just two USAAC Condor IIs. Designated YC-30 and fitted out as VIP transports, they were retired in 1938.

**SWISSAIR'S SOLE EXAMPLE:** A few T-32s saw service in Europe. Swissair's was the last civil Condor II built, but it crashed after four months.

**BT-32 BOMBER IN CHINA:** The turret- and bomb rack-equipped BT-32 appeared in February 1934. This, the first, went to China.

