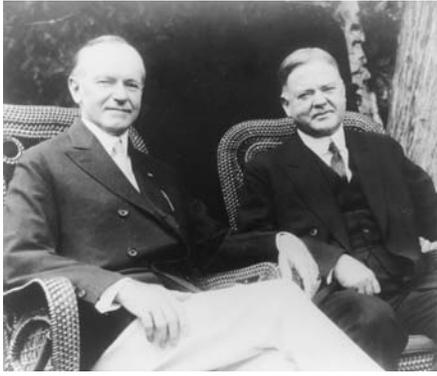


Origins of the FAA



President Calvin Coolidge (right) and
Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover

Eighty-six years ago, on May 20, 1926, President Calvin Coolidge signed the Air Commerce Act of 1926 into law at the urging of aviation industry leaders who believed the airplane could not reach its full commercial potential without federal action. The new legislation, for the first time, created an organization responsible for regulating the fledgling civil aviation industry. The act instructed the Secretary of Commerce to foster air commerce; designate and establish airways; establish, operate, and maintain aids to air navigation (but not airports); arrange for research and development to improve such aids; license pilots; issue airworthiness certificates for aircraft and major aircraft components; and investigate accidents.

Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover believed that the duties imposed by the Air Commerce Act should be carried out by existing Department of Commerce components. Although five principal units made up the Aeronautics Branch, which ranked as a bureau, only two were structurally part of the new Branch – the Air Regulations Division and the Air Information Division. The other three units followed directions from the Branch concerning work to be undertaken, but received detailed guidance and administrative support from other bureau-level components of the Department. Thus, the Airways Division was organized within the Bureau of Lighthouses, the Aeronautical Research Division within the Bureau of Standards, and the Air Mapping Section within the Coast and Geodetic Survey.



Hoover selected William P. MacCracken, Jr., who had played a key role in convincing Congress of the need for this new governmental role, as the first head of the Aeronautics Branch, with the title of Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Aeronautics. In fulfilling his new responsibilities, MacCracken initially concentrated on safety rulemaking and the certification of pilots and aircraft. He issued the first Air Commerce Regulations on December 31, 1926.

The regulations prescribed operational and air traffic safety rules. They also required all aircraft engaged in interstate or foreign commerce to be licensed and marked with an assigned identification number. Pilots of licensed aircraft were required to hold private or commercial licenses. Commercial pilots were classed as either transport or industrial. Failure to apply was punishable by a \$500 fine. On April 6, 1927, MacCracken received Pilot License No. 1. He had

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
AERONAUTICS BRANCH

PILOT'S IDENTIFICATION CARD

This Identification Card, issued on the
6th day of April, 1927, accompanies
Pilot's License No. 1

Age 38
Weight 200 Color hair Brown
Height 6'1½" Color eyes Blue



W.P. MacCracken, Jr.
Pilot's Signature.

FORM R-10 GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
AERONAUTICS BRANCH
FORM R-10C

OFFICIAL NO.
1

This Certifies, That
WILLIAM P. MACCRACKEN, JR.
whose photograph and signature accompany this license,
is a
PRIVATE PILOT
of civil aircraft of the United States. The holder is *not*
authorized to transport persons or property for hire or
reward.

This license expires April 6th, 1928

Herbert Hoover
Secretary of Commerce

offered first license to Orville Wright, who declined, saying he did not need a piece of paper to prove he was the first to fly.

The Bureau quickly went to work to carry out its duties. In addition to the first pilot license, some of the Bureau's other firsts included:

- On December 7, 1926, it issued the first official airworthiness inspection of an American aircraft, a Stinson Detroit
- On February 28, 1927, it announced the first 57 aviation medical examiners (first designees) – incidentally, William MacCracken, Sr., was an early medical examiner

- On March 29, 1927, it issued Aircraft Type Certificate No. 1 to the Buhl Airster.



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
AERONAUTICS BRANCH
FORM R-21

License No. AT-1
Expires

**APPROVED TYPE CERTIFICATE
LICENSED AIRCRAFT**

Name Buhl Aircraft Company
Address Warrenville, Mich.
Application No. 1 Date received 1/31/27 Class

Type 1st Airster
Inspected by J. L. Henschel at Washington, D. C. on 3/29/27

Remarks: