

Basil K. "Bill" Laskar

Bill was born April 18, 1921 in Chicago, Ill of Greek immigrant parents. As a young boy, he fell down some steps and broke his back. He was sent to the Denver Children's hospital, which at the time was one of the only hospitals that could deal with the type of injury he sustained. Unfortunately, he was hospitalized for over five years. When he was well enough to be released, his family moved to Albuquerque, NM in the late 1920s and early 1930s where his love of aviation began. His dad would take him to a grass field near their home, which is the current site of the University of New Mexico's Johnson Gym, to watch old airplanes of the time, land and give people rides. He was also frequently taken to the "old" Albuquerque airport to watch the early airliners and the periodic arrival of aircraft needing refueling that were participating in the many cross-country "speed" races that took place in the early 1930s.



After Bill's dad died, his mother moved him and his two sisters to Belen, NM, thirty miles south of Albuquerque, where she opened The Liberty Café and Bill worked throughout high school. He never missed an opportunity to travel to Albuquerque where he could photograph airplanes and talk to the pilots and mechanics. Ironically while in Belen, they lived in a home they rented from Art Goebel's parents. Art Goebel was a famous race and aerobatic pilot of the time who flew many race planes and a modified Boeing P-12 sponsored by Phillips Petroleum Co. Needless to say, Art was Bill's hero and they became friends. Art sometimes hangered his plane in Albuquerque, and Bill would help him when he could.



Bill graduated from Belen High School in 1940 and moved to Albuquerque where he took a job as a live-in caretaker/watchman at the old Oxnard Airfield just east of the Albuquerque Airport. In exchange for his airport duties, he became an apprentice aircraft mechanic and took flight training in whatever airplane was available at the time. One day while working on an aircraft on the line, he and another mechanic heard an approaching plane and witnessed an aircraft stall on approach and hit the ground nose first. It turned out to be Laura Ingall, the famous aviatrix, flying the original Winnie Mae Lockheed Vega. Bill grabbed his camera and got the now famous shots of her being pulled from the wreckage. She was drenched in oil, but otherwise only shaken but unhurt.



Bill saved several pieces from the wreck. The Fabric is from the rudder and the fabric covered plywood is from the nose. The holes are where the venturi tube was mounted.



When WWII started in December 1941, Bill rushed to the recruiting office to enlist in the Army Air Corp, but was rejected due to his back injury. He quickly applied to Albuquerque's Kirtland Army Airfield and was hired as a civilian aircraft mechanic. During the war he worked as an engine mechanic, airframe sheet metal/covering technician and in other aircraft repair and maintenance activities. At one point during the war, his crew held the Air Corp record for the fastest B-29 engine change. One of Bill's fondest memories occurred when he was riding his Indian motorcycle to work at Kirtland one morning down Girard Blvd SE, when the chain on his cycle broke. As he was struggling to move the motorcycle to the side of the street, a man came out of his home to help him---that man was Ernie Pyle, the famous war correspondent.



After the war ended, Bill opened his own photo shop (Laskar Photos) and also was a photographer for the Albuquerque Journal and Tribune. Also after the war, Bill joined the Civil Air Patrol, held the rank of Captain and photo-documented many of their activities.



In 1953, Bill was hired as a photographer for the newly formed Sandia Laboratories and retired as the Sandia Lab News photographer in 1983.

ARMY MODEL C-45H IN FLIGHT BETWEEN BELEN & SOCCORRO. PILOT, AL HASTINGS. CO-PILOT, LASKAR

During his lifetime, Bill photographed just about every aviation-related activity in New Mexico from the mid 1930s until his death in 2007. His photos have appeared in many aviation publications all over the world and in many books and publications featuring New Mexico aviation. His knowledge about the history of aviation in New Mexico was also sought by numerous historians and writers.



Many of the photos used in telling the story of the Albuquerque aviation history is from Bill's collection. The site is very grateful to Bill's son George Laskar for the permission to use his images.