

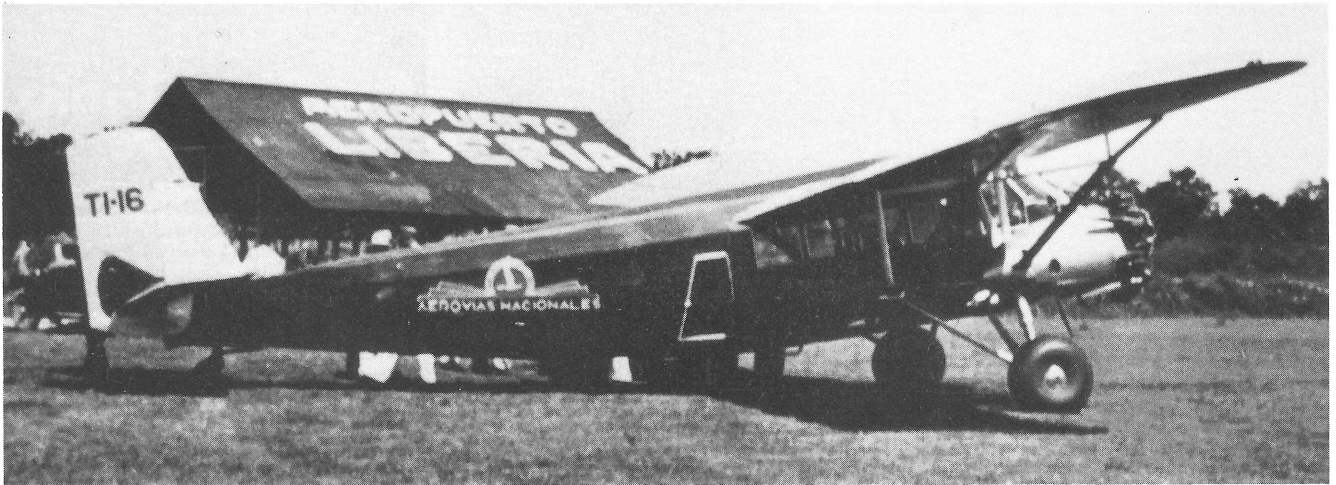
AIR pictorial

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Airbus Industrie A310



Aerovías Nacionales Curtiss D-2 Kingbird TH-16 at Liberia, Guanacaste Province. Introduction of this type in 1934 enabled the airline to adopt and promote the slogan about twin-engine safety

“Con Dos Motores, No Hay Temores”

Aerovías Nacionales—early airline operations in Costa Rica

by GARY KUHN

ADVERTISING SLOGANS are commonplace today as competing airlines stress service, convenience, and, on occasion, special fares. In Costa Rica fifty years ago the need to induce public use plus competition over similar routes led to claims in another category: superior safety. “With two engines, there are no fears” loses its rhyme in translation, but not its message.

The Curtiss Kingbird was proclaimed by Aerovías Nacionales as the ideal aeroplane for Costa Rica, where mountains, jungle and rainstorms were formidable. It was designed to operate safely on a single engine. The two motors were located so far forward and so close together that the loss of one altered the controllability of the aircraft only slightly. There remained not enough power for normal operation, but sufficient to search out a landing area. Furthermore, advertising declared, the bi-motor (this word was stressed) had ample power for rapid ascent from small fields, a slow landing speed, and

remarkable stability. The Kingbird was the only twin-engine type in Costa Rica, and “con dos motores, no hay temores”.

Román Macaya founded Aerovías Nacionales shortly after his celebrated flight of September–October 1933 from California to Costa Rica. An engineering student who learned to fly in Oakland, Macaya purchased a Curtiss Robin with which to return to his native land. This aircraft (NC911K, named “Espíritu Tico”) survived a hazardous journey prolonged by poor weather. The transit of Mexico was complicated also by a shortage of money and some trouble with officials. Meanwhile, the “missing” tico (the nickname for Costa Ricans) aviator was gaining notoriety in the Costa Rican press. Even after Macaya (and his non-flying companion, Paul McCarthy) were located in southern Mexico, continued poor weather in Central America caused further delay, danger and drama. Arrival in San José on 6th October 1933 was the occasion

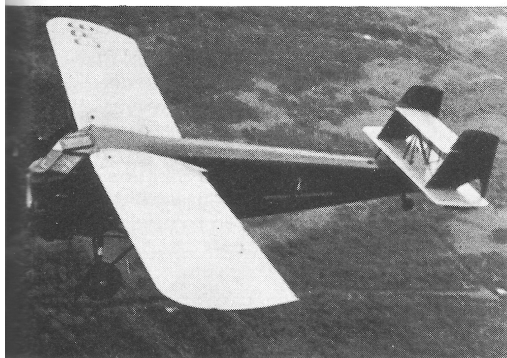
for public ceremonies that helped the suddenly famous Macaya to organise his airline a few months later.

Earlier Pan American Airways had flown a few passengers up to the capital on mail flights from its seaside base on the west coast. A field was established a few miles to the west of San José, but it had such deficiencies as an acidic clay soil that corroded metal. La Sabana on the outskirts of the city was a better location with superior qualities. However, the increasingly popular sport of *fútbol* posed a barrier in that the land had been bequeathed to the populace for recreational use. Nor did many Josefinos appreciate the dawn take-offs (to avoid stormy afternoon weather) and perceived safety problems. After much dispute La Sabana was developed as the nation’s main airfield, remaining so for thirty-five years, until 1971. Today it is again a recreational area. The attractive terminal building has been converted into the national art museum.

ENTA (Empresa Nacional de Transportes Aéreos), the first Costa Rican airline, was already moving toward regular scheduled service when Macaya returned. A subsidy had been secured from the legislature, amid much contro-

Two views of the Curtiss Robin “Espíritu Tico” at Puerto Limón, Costa Rica, October 1933. Román Macaya is on the left in the close-up





Above Left: Curtiss D-2 Kingbird CR-6 displays the type's snub-nose planform and biplane tail. Note early "CR" registration before Costa Rica switched to the prefix "TI"

Top Right: The earlier D-1 Kingbird CR-5 with monoplane tail

Centre Right: D-2 Kingbird TI-8 at New Orleans during its delivery flight in 1935

Bottom Right: A brace of Kingbirds (TI-16 in foreground) at La Sabana, San José



versy. Aerovias Nacionales would also argue successfully that it was worthy of financial aid due to services provided. For a time the two rival airlines engaged in a price war—which at least brought new customers. But in 1935 a "Gentleman's Agreement" on dividing traffic restrained competition. ENTA was largely North American in finance and management; hence Macaya's challenger was appropriately named. Yet foreigners were presumed to have superior technical skills, so no nationalistic advantage existed. Thus the need to stress the safety and efficiency of bimotors.

First Kingbird

The first *tico* Kingbird arrived with much fanfare in May 1934. The eight-passenger airliner replaced the "Espíritu Tico" in service, which carried just two. The famous Curtiss Robin was sold to another small Costa Rican airline, EDAC (Empresa de Aerotransportes Costarricenses), with which it was destroyed on 17th September 1936. Meanwhile more Kingbirds had been acquired by the prospering Aerovias Nacionales.

The model D-2 Kingbird was produced in 1930 for Eastern Air Trans-

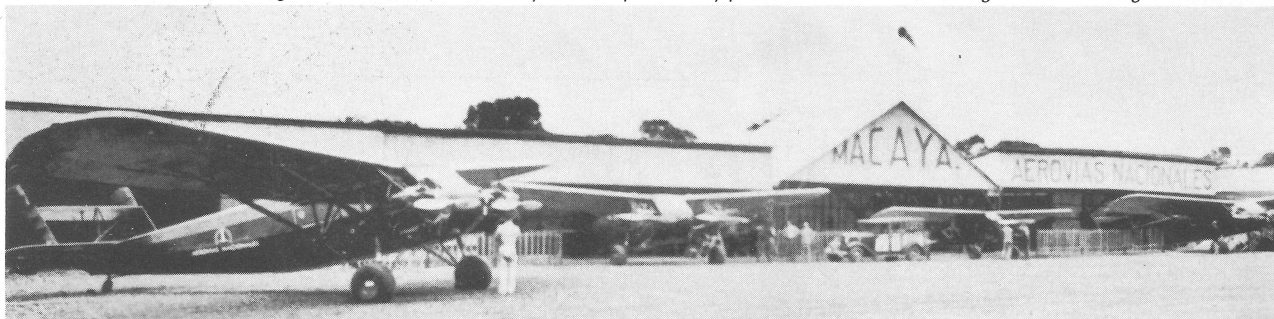
port, ancestor of Eastern Airlines, which purchased fourteen. Their 300-h.p. Wright J6-9 engines represented a significant increase over the 240-h.p. J6-7s (the second numeral indicated the number of cylinders) which powered the three Curtiss D-1 Kingbirds constructed initially.

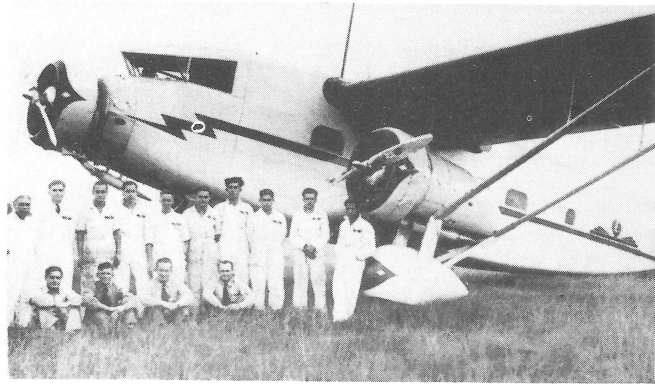
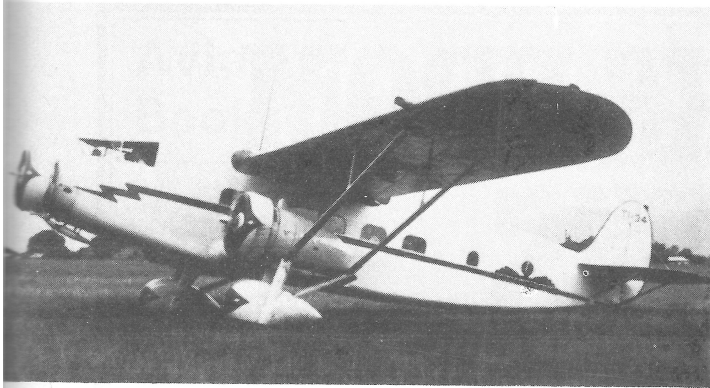
In 1935 the E.A.T. Kingbirds were

replaced. Some reportedly went to Turkey, and others to SACO in Colombia. Three D-2 models were used in Costa Rica, one acquired via LANEP (Lineas Aéreas de Nicaragua Empresa Palazios) in Nicaragua. Aerovias Nacionales' first Kingbird had been a D-1 (see the fleet summary).

While the unique bimotors (ENTA

Aerovias Nacionales hangars at La Sabana, with Macaya's name prominently painted. Aircraft are three Kingbirds and the original Robin





Two views of the twelve-passenger Stinson Model U, TI-34, at La Sabana. In the group photograph on the right Aerovias Nacionales pilots are sitting down in front with white-overalled mechanics standing behind

a western or eastern route was followed.

Daily scheduled flights from San José went westward to several cities in Guanacaste province, the port of Puntarenas and the south-western plantation area of Parrita. The far south, near the Panamanian border, was served on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Limón had only two flights per week when the train was running. All schedules were set for the morning, before the tropical storminess of the afternoon. Timing of service to Quepos varied according to the tide, allowing beach landings.

Smaller aircraft

Several small aircraft were obtained for specialised work. Express trips could be arranged at short notice to many places. The *Revista* of August 1938 advertised a new Rearwin Sportster for use to small private airfields. Dr. Gonzalo Cubero soon acquired this aircraft, becoming the first sport flier in Costa Rica. Earlier a cabin Waco wrecked at Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua was purchased from the *Guardia Nacional* of that country. It was rebuilt in Managua by a woodworker formerly employed by Steinway Piano in New York. A Stinson Reliant was brought by Enrique Malek, who flew for Aerovias Nacionales after the demise of his own airline in Panama.

Aerovias Nacionales was prospering

by 1939, but the end of its operations was at hand. The entry of TACA (Transportes Aéreos Centro Americanas) into Costa Rica brought the overwhelming competition of an airline which had expanded through most of Central America from its base in Honduras. While cargo had formed the basis of TACA's success, new Lockheed 14 airliners enabled it to offer a superior passenger service with international connections. Even the merger of ENTA and Aerovias Nacionales couldn't forestall their inevitable sale to TACA in 1940. The experienced personnel more than the worn aircraft were valuable assets.

In the six years of its existence Aerovias Nacionales had a perfect safety record while serving the scattered population of Costa Rica in a variety of ways appropriate to an era prior to general road construction. Román Macaya, retired in San José, is particularly proud of his mechanics, who were as much responsible for safe operation as his pilots. San José eventually became an international centre for aircraft maintenance. TACA shifted its repair shops from Tegucigalpa in 1943. SALA (Servicio Aeronautico Latinoamérica) was created in 1949, as TACA dissolved. COOPESA (Cooperativo de Servicios Aero-Industriales) was created in 1963 by reorganisation.

Several patched and weary Kingbirds

flew on briefly for TACA in 1940, but they were soon replaced by modern bimotors. But the tradition of safe air service had been established for the populace of Costa Rica, who had heard for years that "con dos motores, no hay temores."

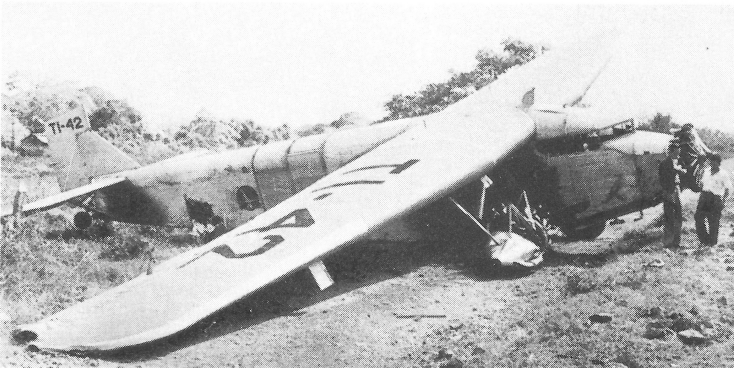
Sources: Interviews with Román Macaya and Rodolfo Ulloa. *U.S. Civil Aircraft*, Juptner; *Historia de la aviación en Costa Rica*, Jiménez; *Central America and the Caribbean Civil Aircraft Registers*, Air-Britain.

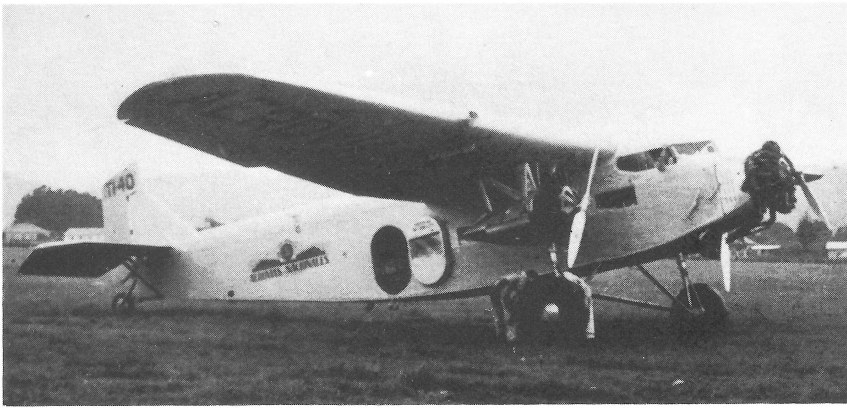
PARTIAL FLEET LIST

Early registration records in Costa Rica have disappeared. The following list is compiled from various fragments of evidence. Additions are welcome.

Reg'n.	Type/Remarks
	Curtiss Robin, ex NC911K, named "Espíritu Tico"
CR-5	Curtiss Kingbird D-1, ex NC374N
TI-6	Curtiss Kingbird D-2, c/n. 2014, ex NC628V, CR-6
TI-8	Curtiss Kingbird D-2, c/n. 2003, ex NC588N
TI-16	Curtiss Kingbird D-2, ex AN-?
TI-18	Travel Air 6000-B
TI-19	Travel Air 6000-B
TI-24	Travel Air 6000-A, ex RX-?
TI-25	Curtiss Kingbird, unconfirmed reg'n.
TI-29	Rearwin 6000-M Speedster, c/n. 310, to Cubero
TI-34	Stinson Model U, c/n. 9023, ex NC12196
TI-40	Ford Tri-motor
TI-41	Ford Tri-motor, c/n. 5-AT-78
TI-42	Ford Tri-motor, c/n. 71, ex NC412H
	Waco Cabin model, Jacobs engine, from G.N. de Nicaragua
	Stinson Reliant, ex RX-Travel Air 6000-A

Left: Pranged Ford Tri-motor TI-42. So far as passengers were concerned, however, Aerovias Nacionales had a perfect safety record throughout its six years' existence. Right: Typical Aerovias Nacionales rural office at Filadelfia, Guanacaste





"Con Dos Motores" . . .

had single- and three-engined types) were most advertised, flights often required smaller or larger aircraft. The other workhorse of Aerovias Nacionales was the Travel Air 6000. Beech Aircraft would later emerge from the company that manufactured this sturdy single-engined type in Wichita. The two Pratt & Whitney Wasp (6000-A) models flown by the airline could log more hours between overhaul than the Wright J6-9 (6000-B) model. The latter was also smaller, with a 48½ ft. wing span compared with 54 ft. for the 6000-A. Both varieties performed well from the dozens of short semi-developed airfields used in charter flights.

Three Ford Tri-motors were acquired for heavy work. Cargo to and from San Isidro de El General, an agricultural centre which was an uncomfortable five-day journey from San José, was a main use. Aviation has been given much credit for development of the San Isidro region, where the Pan American Highway was not completed until the 1950s. One Ford, purchased in Los Angeles, was modified by cutting a hatch through its roof. Macaya's engineering studies ensured that the stressed skin remained sufficiently strong. Another Ford, plus spares, was acquired in Colombia from SACO, when that airline failed after the infamous collision at Medellín that took the life of famed tango singer Carlos Gardel. The third Ford was purchased in St.

Above: Aerovias Nacionales acquired three Ford Tri-motors for heavy cargo work. The first of these was TI-40, seen at La Sabana

Right: One of the destinations served—when the tide was out—was the beach at Quepos on Costa Rica's Pacific coast. Aircraft here is a Ford Tri-motor of the rival airline ENTA



Petersburg, Florida. It was soon heavily damaged at Parrita, but flown back to San José with a bent wing and substitute landing gear.

Aerovias Nacionales flew many charters. They were provided at not much over a cost basis, scheduled service paying the overheads. Farmers and ranchers commuted by air between their lands and San José.

Monthly journal

Starting in 1937 the airline published a monthly journal entitled *Revista Agrícola-Comercial de Costa Rica*. Surrounding a few articles on agricultural matters were advertisements from various businesses. But primarily it boosted the airline, which was identified on the cover by a drawing of

a Kingbird and the caption "dos motores." A monthly feature was a description of one of the dozens of airfields available for use and its distance and compass heading from various others.

Almost daily a corpse was flown from some outlying region to San José for prompt burial. Also urgent was the transport of sick and injured to medical specialists in the capital. A period of high charter demand would occur whenever heavy rains washed out the railway track to Limón. Many extra hours had to be flown to connect San José with the Atlantic port.

Private cargo was shipped at fixed

rates. Unpaid freight were newspapers carried to outlying points, as a means to justify the subsidy paid by the Government. Group charter flights were offered in 1938, due to the acquisition of a twelve-passenger Stinson Model U trimotor. Propaganda in the *Revista* showed such groups as a Salvadoran female basketball team and a theatrical company flying Aerovias Nacionales to Nicaragua. During 1938 the airline carried 438 passengers to Managua and 9,400 lb. of freight.

Every Thursday the radio-equipped Stinson left San José at 6.20 a.m., arriving at Managua at 8.30. The return flight was prompt, reaching San José at 11.30. The precise course varied; usually the weather was different on either side of the mountains and either

Left: Travel Air 6000-A TI-24, powered by a Pratt & Whitney Wasp. Right: Wright-powered Travel Air 6000-B TI-19

