



Vladimir H. Pavlecka in 1979 with a model of the metal-clad airship he hoped to manufacture soon. Times photo

Advocate Saw New Jobs for Old Airships

Vladimir H. Pavlecka, 79, Was Last Survivor of Design Team

He was probably the world's foremost proponent of giant airships, those cigar-shaped craft that once hauled thousands of vacationers across the Atlantic and later patrolled the West Coast during World War II.

For Vladimir H. Pavlecka, 79, was the only survivor of the three designers of the first and only operational metal-clad airship, the Navy's ZMC-2.

The ZMC-2, nicknamed "The Bubble" because of its aluminum bag, was flown by the Navy without mishap for 12 years from 1929 until decommissioned in 1942.

Last September in a Times interview, Pavlecka, chief scientist for the Tustin-based Airships International Inc., said with conviction:

"I sense now more than any time since the giant airships were swept into oblivion in the 1930s that they will soon return to the skies.

"With the cost of fuel escalating astronomically and oil sources diminishing, airships must be considered as energy-conserving, non-polluting alternatives."

In May, 1977, a group of 20 scientists and engineers from several Southern California aerospace firms formed Airships International for the purpose of creating an airship industry in this country.

Ten days ago, Airships Interna-

tional moved into a new headquarters in Tustin across from the Marine Corps air station, where two huge hangars house the Navy blimps used for coastal patrol during World War II.

The next day, June 28, while parking his car in Newport Beach, Pavlecka slumped over the wheel and died, apparently of a heart attack.

Pavlecka never wavered from his belief that aluminum alloy as an outer covering for airships is far superior to conventional fabrics.

Not that Pavlecka was a single-purpose designer. In 1933 he first transferred his knowledge of light metal aircraft structures from airships to airplanes and contributed to the design of the DC-3 for Douglas Aircraft Co. in Santa Monica.

In 1935 Pavlecka's design of a new type of aircraft engine was sent to Pratt & Whitney by Douglas and in turn sent to Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

But four years passed before Pavlecka finally convinced John Northrop to invest in his jet engine design.

The result was Northrop's Turbodyne project which was later changed to a turboprop by the Navy which feared that Pavlecka's jet would set wooden aircraft carrier decks on fire.

In Pavlecka's office in Airships International's new complex hangs a giant physical map of the world, plotted with locations of potential customers for the huge lighter-than-air MC-7s which Pavlecka designed.

He saw the Coast Guard using them as offshore patrol platforms; lumber companies using them to lift logs out of the forest; mining companies extracting copper in New Guinea; and Japan, the Philippines and Hawaii establishing inter-island transports.

In one of his last interviews, Pavlecka said, "I am convinced that with the modern techniques of metal bonding, thruster control and boundary layer removal, the all-metal airship represents the best and most fuel-efficient vehicle to solve our present and future transportation problems.

"The Japanese are already in the second year of a \$75-million, six-year development program, but the original techniques were developed in this country 50 years ago with the ZMC-2. I am the last surviving member of the ZMC-2 design team. I'm afraid that if I don't do this, it won't get done. Anyone else would have to go back to the very beginning."

—CHARLES HILLINGER