

The Flight of the American Moth: Portsmouth Aviation History

In 1927, Portsmouth became an airplane manufacturing center when William Burke, President of Vulcan Last Company, met an aviation promoter looking for a financial backer. The Vulcan Aircraft Company was formed when two brothers, Wilson and Harvey Doyle, and two Ford Motors engineers met Burke.

The two brothers from North Carolina were hired as the aircraft designers. The Doyles had been on their way to Detroit to launch their careers when 'considerable' interest was discovered in Portsmouth, Ohio. When several drawings were completed, the company rented a former streetcar barn in the middle of town. The result of their efforts became known as the American Moth. The name was derived from the popular English DeHaviland Company, producers of the British DeHaviland Moth.

The airplanes built were considered advanced for their day with a look of a latter day 1930's European fighter aircraft. The aircraft design was that of a single-winged plane with a yellow body and trimmed in red.

A local pilot, Pat Love, performed the first test flight from the Raven Rock Airport in the spring of 1928. The same pilot was killed later on a test flight for another company.

The Vulcan Aviation Company's first plane took official flight in February 1928 in an exhibition over the city. On March 31, 1928, the Vulcan's "American Moth" returned to Raven Rock Airport from a 3,300 mile promotional flight. While the "Moth" was successful, the company was not as it took a 'nosedive' in November 1928, and was sold to a firm in Indiana who went on to produce twenty-five more aircraft. For a short time, Portsmouth had its place in aviation history.