



America from the Air: An Aviator's Story (American Land Classics)

Wolfgang Langewiesche

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"I am no helmeted, begoggled hero of the skies; picture me bookish, bespectacled, unable to hold even a teacup without rattling it. As a pilot, I am merely an amateur, and I know it.... I shouldn't be talking. But I can't help talking. For you take the air: the thin, substanceless air that can be made to bear a man; you take America; and you take an airplane, which of all the works of man is the nearest to a living being? you take those things and mix them up, and they will act as a drug which will knock all proper reticence right out of you. And so, here I go talking..."?from *America from the Air*

In 1927, Charles Lindbergh made his historic solo flight across the Atlantic; Amelia Earhart became the first woman to do so in 1932. And so was born the golden age of flying. Aviators became the era's new heroes and the airplane its icon. In early 1930s Chicago, a German-born graduate student became fascinated by the airplane and its usefulness as a great geographic and sociological tool. Wolfgang Langewiesche sold his car and used his meager salary to pay for flying lessons at 25 cents a minute.

With the same passion America had taken to the road a decade earlier, Langewiesche took to the air. He eagerly inhaled the landscape and breathed observations about the country, writing a series of books that describe the heady excitement and freedom of flight and the stunning views of his adopted country from an entirely new vantage point?the sky. This new edited volume revives the writings from two of his now out-of-print books. *America from the Air* draws from Langewiesche's classic account of his early experiences as a pilot, *I'll Take the High Road* (first published in 1939 and praised by the *New York Times* as "a stirring and revealing story, told with sensitiveness and lucidity and with the warmth of a modest personal charm"), and selections from his 1951 memoir, *A Flier's World*, to create a distinctive book that provides a pioneering look at the American landscape as seen from the cockpit of a light plane. Langewiesche's photographs from his cross-country flights circa 1939 evoke the era.

Wolfgang Langewiesche is revered among pilots for his 1944 flying primer, *Stick and Rudder*, currently in its seventieth printing. Considered the bible of aviation, it tells us the "how" of flying; *America from the Air* tells us the "why." Here his descriptions of the country offer unique perspectives on New England, the Midwest, and the Atlantic Coast from Virginia to Key West, at a time before the country was paved over by multilane expressways, suburban tract housing, and strip malls. His bird's-eye view of America takes in small farms, deserted seashores, busy railway lines, and cities in which skyscrapers were still engineering marvels. With the keen eye of a surveyor and an uncommon talent for conveying the physical sensation of flying, he describes landscape in all its beauty and detail as it rolls out beneath him, unveiling its mysteries. Langewiesche is revealed here as an infectious enthusiastic aviator and an unrivaled observer of the American landscape. In a new foreword, Langewiesche's son, writer William Langewiesche, describes his father's love of the view from above. Hokanson and Kratz's introduction and biography update the reader, incorporating stories gleaned from recent interviews with the author.

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