Chapter Six
Capt. Noriega, Mexican Test Pilot
and the Maple Leaf II

In March 1929, the Mexican government purchased 12 armed Vought 02U-2M Corsair aircraft, which were powered by the 400 h. p. Wasp engine. They were used to quell a very serious military coup, [General Escobar military coup] and it is possible Lt. Noriega even piloted some of these aircraft.
The Mexican Air Force were so impressed by the performance of these aircraft, they obtained the rights to build 31 more under licence from Chance-Vought Corp. These Mexican built aircraft were called *Corsarios Azcarate* and given the Mexican Model Corsair 02U-4A.

It is believed that Lt. Noriega became the Mexican test-pilot for these Corsair 02U-4A aircraft built in Mexico City 1936-1937. He was a senior most qualified pilot, trained at Randolph Field, Texas, and stationed at Balbuena Field, Mexico City, however the date he became a test-pilot is not confirmed. On 20 October 1937, he was promoted to Captain 2nd Pilot Aviador in Mexico City, and it is believed with this promotion, he now officially became a Mexican Air Force “Test Pilot.”
El Secretario de Estado del Despacho Guerra Marina

a que fueron satisfechos los requisitos exigidos para la "Promoción 1856,
C. T. de la Marina, F. A. Luis Xorriaga Medrano,
por el Presidente Constitucional de los
Capitán 2º Floto Aviador de la propia Armada,
anterioridad de primer año de mil novecientos treinta y seis
consideraciones
Militares, depresión
Hacienda, crédito Público,

viernes veintiocho octubre mil novecientos treinta y seis

Subsecretario del Despacho
In mid-September 1937, the Mexican government wished to keep their Air Force fleet more modern and purchased ten new Corsair Model V-99M aircraft, equipped with the more powerful Pratt and Whitney R-1340-T1H1, 550 h. p. Wasp engine.
Wikimedia Commons image of original Corsair V-93 in Royal Thai Air Force Museum
This image was taken in Mexico City, [summer 1934] while Lt. Noriega was still in training at Randolph Field, Texas. The man in the center, facing the camera is Mexican President Cardenas, the man on his right is former President Calles, and the man on his left, [hand on shoulder of the President] is General Saturnino Cedillo, future Mexican rebel leader. The three are temporarily at peace, however in Mexico that can change very quickly, which it did in early May 1938. It is possible that President Cardenas understood he
might have problems from General Cedillo, which influenced him to purchase ten more modern aircraft. If that is in fact the truth, it would prove to be a very wise decision on his part. Riots began in Mexico City on 14 May 1938, followed by another Army rebellion. This story appeared in the 30 May 1938, issue of LIFE magazine.

TROUBLED MEXICO’S LATEST WORRY

IS LOCAL “STRONG MAN” CEDILLO

A good nervous system is the indispensable attribute of every Mexican president. That of President Lázaro Cárdenas served him well during the week of May 14–21, when riots in Mexico City, falling currency, severance of relations with a great foreign power, and a Rightist rebellion gave him as much to worry about as a European statesman encounters in his entire term of office.

Much of the week’s turbulence resulted directly or indirectly from the Government’s expropriation of $450,000,000 worth of British and American oil holdings (LIFE, April 11). Rising acrimony over this act caused Mexico and Great Britain to call home their respective ambassadors. Boycotts of the Government-owned oil caused the peso to slump sharply. And agents of the dispossessed oil interests—so President Cárdenas charged—incited tough General Saturnino Cedillo, strong man of San Luis Potosí, to lead his armed peasant followers in revolt.

Whether General Cedillo was inspired by moneyed antagonists of the Leftist administration or simply by his own cantankerous distaste for central authority, his rising electrified the Government. President Cárdenas poured troops and planes into the State of San Luis Potosí. Meanwhile smart observers wondered if Mexico’s embattled President did not secretly welcome this diversion. If rebel Cedillo could be sternly checked, as seemed not unlikely, Lázaro Cárdenas would assume the role of Patriot and Strong Man, both in the sight of foreign powers and in that of his own anxious countrymen.
Las Palomas, Cedillo's ranch in western San Luis Potosi, is fortified and guarded by detachments of his 15,000 "Agrarian" troops. Nearby are convenient mountain hideouts.

Cedillo's rancheros look picturesque and theatrical but President Cárdenas regards them as a menace. Their favorite tactic is to rip up railroad tracks. This they did on May 20.
General Saturnino Cedillo, now 61, once rode with Pancho Villa. Today he is a Conservative, claims the support of industrialists, landowners, clergy, in opposition to Cardenas.

A private radio station helps keep the General in touch with his followers. He has steadfastly refused to incorporate his private forces into the army of the Federal Government.

Image is part of the 50,000-acre ranch owned by General Cedillo.
On 23 May 1938, Mexican Governor of San Potosi, General Saturnino Cedillo, declared himself the leader of his private Army [15,000 strong] rebellion against President Lazaro Cardenas. General Saturnino Cedillo Martinez had participated in the Mexican revolution and the Cristero Religious War. His first armed revolts began in November 1912, and continued off and on with arrests, imprisonment, and fights with his government. In response to this new rebellion, the Mexican Air Force organized a fleet of seventeen Corsair aircraft, including all of the ten new V-99-M models. Captain Noriega possibly flew against this rebel Army force, which the Air Force attacked in San Luis Potosi, and the enemy ran for cover in the Huasteca Hills, then dispersed, abandoning their leader.
This private image shows Capt. Noriega climbing into a Vought Corsair V-99-M, with the rear gunner, showing the 9 mm Colt MG-40 machine gun, possibly the first air attacks beginning on 27 May 1938. The rebels knew they had no defence against this weapon and ran, the rebellion was over, again thanks to the modern airplane.

This is another preserved image for modellers, showing the three shades of Mexican aircraft camouflage, and the numbering of the Corsair V-99-M fighters in 1938. By November 1938, the rebellion Army of Cedillo had been either killed or arrested, and all had been disarmed and returned to their life of farming. General Cedillo began a second revolt in January 1939, and was in turn killed by the Mexican Army ground forces on 11 January.
On 8 June 1938, Capt. Luis Noriega Medrano crossed the border at Brownsville, Texas, and he was accompanied by his personnel aircraft mechanic Fernando Vergara Garcia.

![Luis Noriega Medrano](image)

The reason for this visit is not recorded, but due to the fact he was taking his own Mexican mechanic, it can be assumed it involved aircraft and a long flight. In June 1938, Canadian Car and Foundry were manufacturing under license [signed October 1936] the Grumman G-23 Goblin aircraft, [for the RCAF] and records show Mexico was interested in this aircraft. In July 1938, one Grumman Goblin was purchased by Mexico and possibly flown to Mexico City by pilot Lt. Noriega, and that was the logical reason for his mechanic to accompany him to the plant at Fort William, Canada.
The Mexican Air Force were building aircraft, testing, and developing their skills at Balbuena airfield, [Mexico City] and Capt. Luis Noriega was a huge part of this aviation history. I believe he made at least this one trip to Fort William, but that still remains a pure guess. The Mexican government had signed a contract [1940] with Canadian Car and Foundry Company to produce 40 Grumman G-23 Goblins in Mexico, but this aircraft was obsolete in 1936, and without building any aircraft the contract was cancelled in May 1941. Then Capt. Noriega tested a new trainer aircraft built in Mexico.

In June 1937, the Canadian Car and Foundry Company located at Fort William, Ontario, had obtained the manufacturing rights to build a trainer aircraft designed by Leland Stamford Wallace. Known on paper as the “Wallace Trainer” it was a conventional biplane with two open cockpits, entirely covered with fabric. This project was re-named the “MAPLE LEAF I” by “Can Car” and the prototype was completed in March of 1938. Once the Maple Leaf I was completed, it received the Nicaraguan identification GN-4, as the Canadians anticipated an order of at least a dozen
production models for the Latin country. The Nicaraguan Air Force arrived in early April 1938, however they were not pleased with the performance of the Canadian trainer and the production order was cancelled. In August 1938, a new female Chief Aeronautical Engineer was hired by Can Car, and her name was Elsie Gregory MacGill.
The full history of Elsie MacGill can be found on a number of websites and two excellent researched books. The 2008 book titled “Her Daughter - The Engineer” by Richard I. Bourgeois-Doyle is the best from an aviation history perspective [my feelings] and the book launch website of Vintage Wings of Canada is a must, if you are interested to learn more about this most amazing Canadian Lady. In 2015, I talked with Richard Bourgeois-Doyle and he gave me permission to quote from his book, where I have only used selected dates to cross reference my basic research on Mexican pilot Noriega.

Soon after Elsie MacGill began work at Can Car [hired in August] she decided to begin work on a totally new designed aircraft called the “Maple Leaf II.” Only the tail fin and rudder design from the old Maple Leaf I was retained, with new welded steel tube fuselage and steel tube tail, aluminium wing ribs with wood wings construction. It was being built for strength and fully aerobatic for training of future RCAF pilots. On 13 May 1938, the British government had sent an “air mission” to Canada, their objective was to explore the possibilities of purchasing training aircraft from the United States. This group headed by industrialist J. G. Weir, were also instructed to discuss with the Canadian government the possibility of establishing two or more RAF training schools in Canada. On 16 May 1938, the British high commissioner had two meetings with P. M. Mackenzie King and the possibility of sending RAF recruits to be trained in Canada was raised. King was not impressed, however this was just the beginning of what would become the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. I believe this possibly influenced Elsie to design her new training aircraft the Maple Leaf II.
On 28 February 1938, Captain Noriega is promoted to 1st Class Pilot and placed in charge of testing Mexican aircraft.
In February 1939, he crosses into the United States at Brownsville, Texas, destination unknown, not recorded. [Possible second trip to Fort William, Canada]

### Luis Noriega Medrano

<table>
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<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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I believe he came to Canadian Car and Foundry Company to seek advice involving a contract to built 40 CCF Grumman G-23 Goblin aircraft in Mexico City for the Mexican Air Force. This will begin in February 1940, and the production was reduced to fifteen, possibly on the advice of Capt. Noriega. He also learns [possibly even meets Elsie MacGill] that a new Maple Leaf II trainer is being constructed by Elsie MacGill for training pilots in the RCAF.
Her new designed Maple Leaf II prototype is completed and ready for testing by late October 1939. The Can Car Sales Manager O. S. Wallace acted as the test pilot, with designer Elsie MacGill in the second cockpit seat.

The test results indicated an excellent aircraft, however further evaluation by the RCAF and Canadian Department of Transport felt it was not challenging enough for basic RCAF pilot training, and it was rejected. I do not believe that explanation. It did not fit into the organization of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan for 1940, which I will explain later.

“Elsie achieved many firsts during the time women were considered to be inferior in the Sciences.”

This appears in a new book titled “Queen of the Hurricanes” The Fearless Elsie MacGill, by Crystal Sissons. I have not read her book, but the reviews are excellent, including one from Richard I. Bourgeois-Doyle.

We may never fully understand or learn the truth, or why the Canadian Government rejected an application to ship the new trainer to Mexico, however that is for other historians. Can Car would never proceed with any official export application and instead sold the prototype, [Maple Leaf II] two semi-completed airframes, blueprints, jigs, tools, and parts to Columbia Aircraft in New York, on Long Island. From this point on the history is lost, confusing, and just mostly guess work by historians. The Maple Leaf II trainer was photographed in Long Island, New York, in 1940, and that is where it was last seen.
On 8 August 1941, an American military attaché in Mexico City filed a report [No. 75] –

“The first training aircraft constructed entirely in Mexico City was test flown today [6 August 1941] by pilot Captain Luis Noriega Medrano, who put the aircraft through the most rigid tests.”

This is believed to be the original Maple Leaf II.
Image of Captain Luis Noriega, Mexican Test Pilot, one of the few who knew the full history, but recorded nothing, and never related any historical events to his family. [Image believed to be 1939-1940, very close to the time period he flew the Maple Leaf II]
General Robert Fierro, head of the Mexican Air Force, was impressed as the aircraft flew well and he announced on the spot, Mexico was committed to take this first design and build ten more aircraft in Mexico City. It should be noted that Capt. Noriega and General Fierro joined the Mexican Air Force as cadets in 1921, and I’m sure both flew together and trusted each other as qualified pilots. Eventually, ten aircraft were constructed using Can Car parts and the basic design from the Maple Leaf II aircraft. The first flew on 6 August 1941, given the mythical Greek “God of War” name “Ares” and numbered 1 to 10, equipped with a Warner super Scarab 165 h. p. engine.
Using the basic design of Elsie MacGill, under the supervision of celebrated Mexican engineer Robert de las Barreda, the above Ares aircraft was produced in Mexico City, and test flown by Capt. Noriega. It is impossible to measure the impact this trainer aircraft had in the Mexican Air Force, only the reports and records sealed and stored by the government in Mexico City can answer that question. After living in many areas of Mexico, you soon learn it is not what you know, but “WHO” you know, to open the many doors in their government. It is possible that the relatives of mechanic Fernando Vergara Garcia, living in Mexico City, have photos or records of the lost Canadian Maple Leaf II. There is still hope that the original blueprints of Elsie MacGill may survive somewhere in Mexico today.

In 2008, Richard I. Bourgeois-Doyle [National Research Council of Canada, Ottawa, Canada] published his book – *Her Daughter, The Engineer, the life of Elsie Gregory MacGill*, and much of the aviation world was shocked to learn the detailed history of this most amazing Canadian lady. Why had this major part of Canadian Aviation remained silent and forgotten for so many years. The answer is possibly the combination of Canada going to war and the supply and demand of WW II trainer aircraft.

When World War Two came to Canada in September 1939, the government aligned itself squarely on the British side, and the United Kingdom made an urgent appeal to increase her air training schools in Canada. This led to the forming of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, combined with the building of twenty-six RAF operated training schools in Canada. The Canadian Maple Leaf II trainer first flew 31 October 1939, at the same time Canada and the United Kingdom were having planning discussions on the
size, airfields, and training aircraft, required for the B.C.A.T.P. The British controlled the type of aircraft they wanted for training of their pilots in Canada, and many of these decisions had been made in 1938. All of the aircraft, with the exception of the Canadian built Fleet Finch [with American engine] were standard training aircraft in British training schools. In 1940, there was no shortage of elementary and single-engine advanced trainers being produced in Canada, in fact supply was running ahead of requirements. By agreement signed in 1939, Canadian factories had concentrated on production of British training aircraft and not combat aircraft. By 1938, the British Air Ministry had selected the American Harvard aircraft as the best combat trainer and purchased [or ordered] 400 in the pre-war period. When war broke out, the British placed an order for 533 Harvard trainers to be delivered to Canada, and the Canadian government placed an order for 310 more Harvard aircraft. The B.C.A.T.P. was signed on 17 December 1939, and total training aircraft was calculated at 702 Tiger Moths, and Fleet Finches for elementary training schools, 720 North American Harvards for advanced training schools, 1,368 twin-engine Avro Ansons for pilot and observers training and 750 Fairy Battles sent from England, for air gunners and wireless operators training. The simple fact was the British and Canadian governments did not need or want a new trainer aircraft [Maple Leaf II] and I’m sure Elsie MacGill understood this reasoning, and moved on with her supervision of the Canadian built Hurricane fighters. I believe she had failed to take into account the extent Canada depended on Great Britain and United States for all her aircraft engine manufacturing. With the Americans and British together controlling the allocation of aircraft engines, the new Maple Leaf II was doomed from the very beginning. In early 1942, Elsie would be confronted with the same problem, as the Canadian Manufactured Hurricane
fighters at Fort William, could only fly with the American built Packard Rolls-Royce engine manufactured in Detroit, USA. The RAF and Americans were unwilling to allocate these “Canadian” built fighters back to the RCAF for protection of Canada. Because no aircraft-engines were manufactured in Canada during WWII, the Canadian government had no control over the Hurricane built fighters, causing many political problems in protecting the West Coast of Canada after 7 December 1941. [Another story]
The Mexican Air Force manufactured their “own” ten Ares aircraft in Mexico City, and equipped them with the Warner Super Scarab 165 h. p. engine.
They were built in 1941, under supervision of Roberto de la Barreda using parts from Can Car Maple Leaf production line. Beginning on 6 August 1941, [first flight of an Ares trainer] I’m positive Capt. Noriega test flew all of the ten aircraft, but he never spoke about this to his family.

This magazine image taken at a Mexico City air show in fall of 1941, captures three of the Mexican built Ares trainer aircraft. The tail was painted in Mexican National colors [front Green, White and Red] with the overall aircraft in dark blue, the wings were bright yellow, and the identification was possibly in white, E-1 to E-10. When this photo was taken, the Mexican plant was in production of five new trainer aircraft they called “Teziutlan” [below] and they would fly in April 1942, just as Mexico entered World War Two.
This Teziutlan image appears on the cover of the plastic model kit, showing the same colors as the Ares trainers were painted.

That Mexico is rapidly building an air force and air industry is apparent in this new Teziutlan trainer designed by General Roberto Fiero, Chief of Mexico’s air force. An all-plywood design, it is now in production at the government plant. With 125 hp Lycoming engine, it has 7-hour range, high ceiling.
The new Mexican “Teziutlan” trainer was possibly designed around testing of the original Maple Leaf II aircraft [by Capt. Noriega] and constructed entirely of plywood. The development and manufacturing of the Maple Leaf II by Elsie MacGill, surely influenced the design of this 1942 Mexican trainer, by an all-male Mexican engineering team. I guess we will never know the truth.
Mexico declared war on the Axis countries on 28 May 1942, after her shipping had been attacked by German U-boats in the Gulf of Mexico. The Mexican Air Force was under command of General Roberto Fierro Villalobos, which included two Air Regiments, and the Flying Training School, where Capt. Luis Noriega was in charge of testing, and pilot training. From this date until 1945, the United States Army Air Force became responsible for training, equipping, and reorganization of the majority of Latin American Air Forces who declared war on the Axis powers.

Captain Luis Noriega [Officer in Charge] returns for training in the United States and World War Two begins for Mexico.

To be continued on Chapter Seven.