

Dr. John A. Tamisiea – Founding Pioneer of the Aerospace Medical Association

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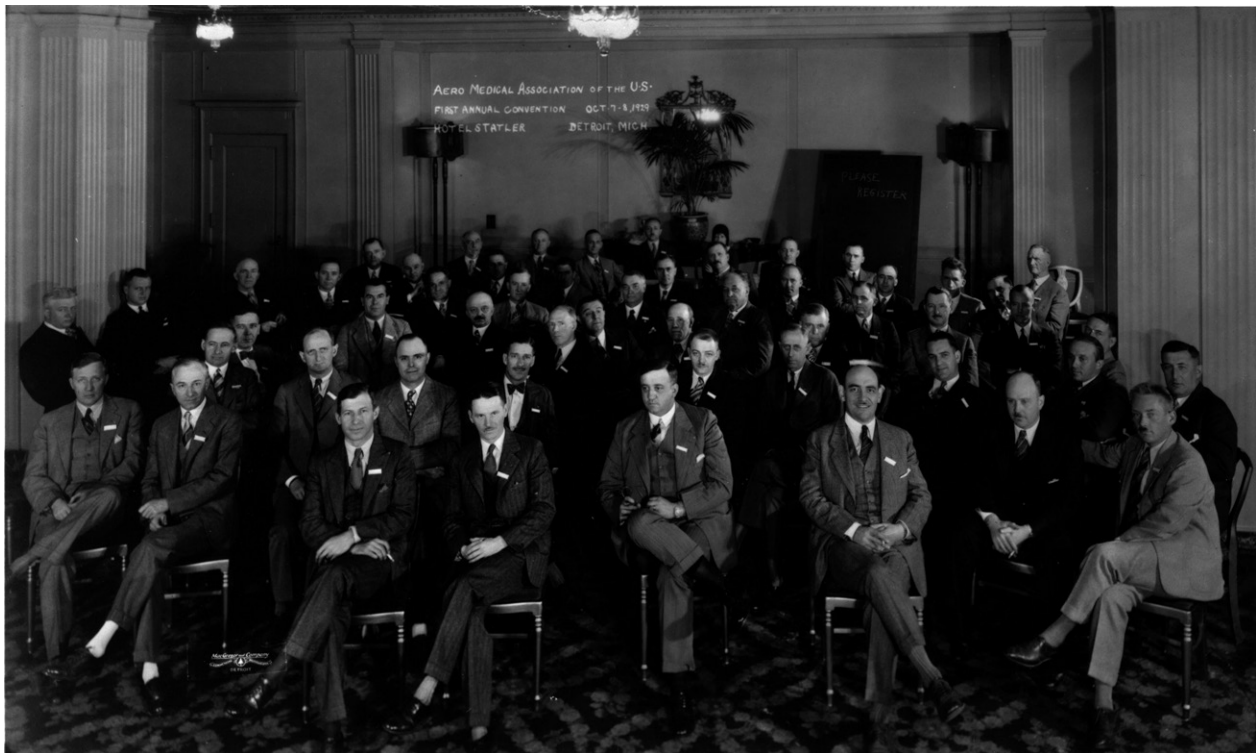


Fig. 1. The first meeting of the Aero Medical Association in Detroit in October 1929. Dr. Tamisiea is on the front row, third from the right.

One of the founding pioneers of the Aero Medical Association was Dr. John Tamisiea (1893–1958). He graduated from Creighton Medical College in 1916 and served as a British flight surgeon in World War I. He later graduated from the U.S. Army School of Aviation Medicine in 1926. He has the distinction of delivering the very first presentation at the very first meeting of the Aero Medical Association in Detroit in 1929. He was the President of the organization in 1935–1936 and was named a Fellow in Aviation Medicine in 1942. He was one of 10 inductees in the original founding group of Fellows to receive this honor. He also served in World War II and the Korean War before retiring from the Air Force as a Colonel in 1953. For many years between the wars he was the Medical Director of Boeing Air Transport Company (later United Airlines). He was one of the first physicians hired by Boeing when it began flying mail and passengers in the 1920s and was in the first group of medical examiners appointed in 1927 by Dr. Bauer (who was the Medical Director of the Bureau of Air Commerce).

During World War I (1917–1919), he was a flight surgeon with the British Royal Flying Corp. One day the commanding general

arrived at the base unexpectedly and found Dr. Tamisiea not at his duty station as he was out flying. He was transferred to the 51st Scottish Division on the front lines in France! This was in 1918 and he was a first lieutenant in the medical corp. On another day, after some heavy shelling, he was completely buried in a front line trench and was not completely extricated for 3 hours. He was mustard gassed 2 weeks later and required evacuation. He was awarded a Purple Heart and the British Service Medal.

He described the first meeting of the Aero Medical Association in Detroit in October 1929 (**Fig. 1**) as being quite exciting. There were only 60 physicians in attendance (35 were members)

From Paris, TX.

This feature is coordinated and edited by Mark Campbell, M.D. It is not peer-reviewed. The AsMA History and Archives Committee sponsors the Focus as a forum to introduce and discuss a variety of topics involving all aspects of aerospace medicine history. Please send your submissions and comments via email to: mcamp@1starnet.com.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3357/AMHP.5241.2018>

and Dr. Louis Bauer was elected President. Most of the meeting was used to adopt the Constitution and By-Laws and to elect officers. Dr. Bauer addressed the organization after being elected President and emphasized the importance of the organization to all physicians involved in flying training or as aviation medical examiners. After Dr. Tamisiea presented his paper, Dr. Bauer also discussed many of the issues and problems with the Department of Commerce aviation medical examiners.¹ The membership rapidly grew and by the time Dr. Tamisiea was President in 1936 (Fig. 2) the organization had 700 members with \$775 in the bank account (it would drop to \$121 by 1939).

Dr. Tamisiea presented the first and only paper at that 1929 meeting, entitled "Relation of Hypotension in Aviation." It described his experience in examining the 30 pilots of the Boeing Air Transport Company over 2.5 years. He was required to examine them every 30 days and observed that they always had a low blood pressure (102–114 systolic). He started an exercise program for the pilots but noticed no effect on the blood pressure readings. The paper was never published but generated great interest at the meeting. As Dr. Tamisiea reported decades later, "As I remember it, I merely presented this paper, laying these facts in their laps. I had no explanation for my findings but was anxious to learn if anyone else had. There was a lot of discussion regarding the

influence of adrenal, thyroid and pituitary glands, but as far as I know, that is where the matter ended. I know of no airlines requiring a monthly checkup now, so I don't know what the findings would be today with present flight equipment."

Dr. Tamisiea was truly a pioneer in the early years of our organization and one of many pillars which form the foundation of the Aerospace Medical Association. The John A. Tamisiea Award was established by the Civil Aviation Medical Association and is awarded annually to an "aviation medical examiner who has made an outstanding contribution to the art and science of aviation medicine."

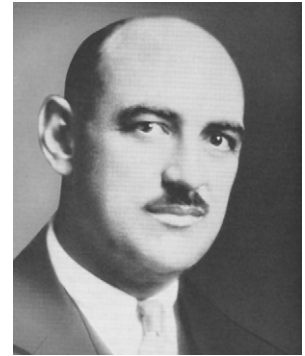


Fig. 2. John A. Tamisiea, M.D., sixth president of the Aero Medical Association (1935–1936).

REFERENCE

1. Benford RJ. Doctors in the sky—the story of the Aero Medical Association. Springfield (IL): Thomas; 1955:18, 68.