

On a clear and sunny October 26, 1968, an excited crowd of people, one hundred or more, were grouped around a unique looking airplane. A good percentage of these people had in some way or the other contributed to the existence of this aircraft. It was Pazmany's PL-1, and it had taken 100 days to complete. Homebuilders will spend two to three years to see their efforts in constructing a homebuilt aircraft finally get off the ground. So here was a homebuilt that was completed in 100 days.

To find out why the Republic of China was invading the homebuilding field, we must go back to the previous year when it was decided that the Chinese Air Force was in immediate need of a light, all-purpose trainer for their Air Cadet flying training program. With an extremely limited budget, the CAF had to look for outstanding aircraft performance at the lowest possible cost. What aircraft would meet the performance desired? There were many production aircraft from which to choose; however, an outright buy was found to be outside budget limitations. At this time, Gen Ku, who headed the Air Technical Bureau of the Chinese Air Force, and an avid reader of most all aviation publications, came up with the idea of looking into available homebuilt aircraft as a possible source for a training aircraft. This was a more attractive proposal when considering that the CAF had a large number of skilled technicians with over twenty years of aircraft manufacturing experience; however, who had not been utilized in this capacity for many years.

After a fairly exhaustive study of the available homebuilt aircraft, it was decided that Pazmany's PL-1 offered the best aircraft in the homebuilt field. Simple construction design, side by side seating, an allowable +6 Gs and -3 G's (it should be able to withstand student abuse), fully acrobatic, strong tricycle gear, and designed with many safety features. Was Mr. Pazmany willing to negotiate with the CAF for construction of a prototype with an option to build thirty-five more? Obviously, Mr. Pazmany was delighted with this opportunity. He would also be standing by to render all technical assistance during construction of the prototype. With a distance of 7,000 miles separating them, air mail would be their only contact.

With final arrangements completed, Air Technical Bureau was given the task of supervising the entire project. What was target date for completion? Commander in Chief of the CAF, Gen Lai told Gen Ku that a finished and flying PL-1 would be a fine accomplishment to present to President Chiang, Kai-shek, in celebration of his 82nd birthday, October 31. Could ATB meet this date? Gen Ku now had to rely on the experience and judgment of his close friend, Col Lee, Chief of the Aeronautical Research Laboratory, whose organization would be charged with the actual construction of the PL-1. After a close study of all factors involved, Gen Ku and Col Lee accepted the challenge and were required to establish a production schedule of no more than 100 days to meet the October deadline. This schedule was so tight that virtually no slippage was programmed. In fact, from roll-out to test flight allowed only one day. Once rolled out, the PL-1 had to be fully airworthy. The single biggest factor in meeting production time would be acquiring parts from the US and the long shipping time to Taiwan.

Rapidly, construction of the PL-1 started. The problems encountered, in such an undertaking, are too numerous to mention, but significantly each and every problem was overcome with ingenuity, resourcefulness and plain hard work. Everyone visiting the construction facility couldn't fail to see the outstanding craftsmanship these old timers had never lost. For every delay in the production schedule for parts or equipment, these outstanding craftsmen would offset the delay by surging ahead with the basic construction of the PL-1. Almost unbelievably the project was making its target date. 99 days after the starting date the PL-1 was completed and rolled into the paint shop. This would be a complete aircraft when finished, including avionics and equipped for night and instrument flying.

This, then, was the 100th day. The excited crowd was eagerly anticipating the first flight. Lt Col Wan and Maj King, the two test pilots selected from among the most experienced instructor pilots at the CAF Flying Academy, were already in the cockpit preparing for the first flight. Just a few hours before, the pilots had completed all taxi and ground handling tests without any discrepancies. The large crowd, still excited, had to be moved back so the PL-1 could make its way to the runway. On that sunny 26th of October, the beautifully painted PL-1 lined up for its first flight. Take-off roll started and the PL-1, after a short run, rose about five feet into the air and then quickly the power was cut and a landing made. For those who didn't know that this was a planned maneuver to test flight controls, it seemed something must be wrong. The PL-1 taxied back for another take-off. Once again the same procedure, a short distance into the air, then a throttle chop. Now with all controls satisfactorily checked, the third take-off was made. There was no power reduction this time, and the PL-1 rose gracefully into the air. With darkness approaching, the flight could only last a short time. However, sufficient time to know that the PL-1 was fully airworthy.

The landing was smooth and as the PL-1 touched down, a spontaneous cheer came from the delighted crowd. What did the pilots think of the PL-1 first flight? Only that the aircraft had met every one of their expectations. Did L/Col Wang think the PL-1 could be flown to Ping Tung, the south part of Taiwan, where the Presidential Review was to be held in honor of the President's birthday? L/Col Wang stated that he would be happy to fly the PL-1 to Ping Tung and had no reservations on its capability to make the trip. The following day the PL-1 was flying south for a meeting with President Chiang. Upon its arrival at Ping Tung, the PL-1 was readied in its static display area under the supervision of Gen Ku and Col Lee, who had arrived earlier. Later that day a pleased and beaming President looked over the PL-1, the Republic of China's first venture into aircraft production in Taiwan. Proudly standing by the PL-1, Gen Ku and Col Lee were congratulated by the "Gimo" for their outstanding efforts.

What lies in store for the PL-1's? A concentrated flight test program with three prototypes, then an anticipated production of thirty-five PL-1's to be completed within twelve months.

Lt Col Robert M. Loeffler (USAF)
MAAG Advisory Team
Taichung-Taiwan

