

IGOR SIKORSKY

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Sikorsky, Igor Ivanovitch (1889-1972), a scientist, engineer, pilot, and entrepreneur, designed the world's first four-engined airplane in 1913 (precursor to the most successful bomber of World War I) and the world's first true production helicopter. His single-rotor design, a major breakthrough in helicopter technology, remains the dominant configuration today. The winged-S emblem still signifies the world's most advanced rotorcraft.

Born in Kiev, Russia, Sikorsky was the youngest of five children. His father, a medical doctor and psychologist, inspired him to explore and learn. He developed a keen interest in mechanics and astronomy. While still a schoolboy he built several model aircraft and helicopters, as well as bombs. After completing formal education in Russia and France, Sikorsky attracted international recognition in 1913 at the age of 24 when he designed and flew the first multimotor airplane. In 1918, Sikorsky decided to flee his native country. "What were called the ideals and principles of the Marxist revolution were not acceptable to me." He left Petrograd (St. Petersburg) by rail for Murmansk and from there boarded a steamer for England. Having lost all his savings, he arrived in England with only a few hundred English pounds.

He settled in the United States in 1919, eventually founding the Sikorsky Aero Engineering Corporation, the forerunner of the Sikorsky Division of United

Technologies. The corporation now manufactures helicopters for sale around the world. Continually designing aircraft, Sikorsky received many other patents, including patents for helicopter control and stability systems. He grasped the humanitarian advantages of helicopters over airplanes. “If a man is in need of rescue,” he said, “an airplane can come in and throw flowers on him, and that’s just about all....., but a direct-lift aircraft could come in and save his life.” In the 1930's, Sikorsky designed and manufactured a series of large passenger-carrying flying “boats” that pioneered the transoceanic commercial air routes in the Caribbean and Pacific.

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