

The Spruce Goose



In 1942, America and England were at war with Germany. Soldiers and supplies needed to be sent from America to England. The only way to send it all was by ship. The journey from America to England was long and **arduous**. It often took weeks for a ship to leave the United States and arrive in England. German submarines traveled the seas and destroyed American ships. Many of the ships that left America for England never arrived.

Howard Hughes and Henry Kaiser had a solution to this problem. They decided to build a fleet of very large airplanes called the HK-1. These could safely do the same job as the ships that were delivering soldiers and supplies to England. Because of the war, there was very little metal available. As a result, they decided to build the huge airplane almost entirely of wood. The idea to build an aircraft from wood seemed crazy to many people. They jokingly called **it** the “Spruce Goose”. Spruce is a type of tree. However, Hughes wanted to use wood from birch trees for the HK-1.

Henry Kaiser became frustrated at Howard Hughes because he took so long to make the first HK-1. Kaiser **resigned** from the project so Hughes worked alone on it. He changed the name of the plane to the “H-4 Hercules”. The first H-4 was not completed until 1947. The war in Europe had already ended two years earlier, in 1945. Still, the first aircraft was impressive and huge. It was 66 meters long and spanned 97.5 meters from one wing tip to the other. It had eight powerful engines. It could take off and land on the water. It weighed 136,000 kilograms. It was designed to carry 68,000 kilograms. This was the same weight as 750 soldiers or two tanks. It was easily the largest aircraft in the world. It was so big that many people doubted it could actually fly.

The H-4 only flew one time. On November 2, 1947, Howard Hughes showed a group of reporters that the plane could indeed fly. The H-4 took off from the waters near California. It flew for about 2 kilometers at an altitude of 21 meters. With the war ended, the H-4 was no longer needed. It never flew again. No more H-4 Hercules were made. The only H-4 ever built is now on display at the Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum in Oregon.



1. According to the article, when were America and England at war with Germany?
 - a) 1924
 - b) 1942
 - c) 1947
 - d) 1974
2. The word “arduous” in paragraph 1 could best be replaced with:
 - a) boring
 - b) average
 - c) difficult
 - d) interesting
3. According to the article, why did Kaiser and Hughes decide to build a fleet of very large aircraft?
 - a) because they wanted to make a new company
 - b) to help get supplies from America to England
 - c) so they could become very rich and famous
 - d) because they were interested in airplanes
4. The word “it” in paragraph 2 refers to:
 - a) wood
 - b) a name
 - c) an aircraft
 - d) some people
5. According to the article, why did some people call Hughes’ airplane the “Spruce Goose”?
 - a) because it was made almost entirely from wood
 - b) because the aircraft looked very similar to a goose
 - c) because the airplane was too large to fly
 - d) because Howard Hughes named it “Spruce Goose”
6. The word “resigned” in paragraph 3 could best be replaced with:
 - a) spent
 - b) quit
 - c) worked
 - d) joined
7. According to the article, why was only one H-4 Hercules made?
 - a) because Hughes ran out of money
 - b) because the H-4 could not fly
 - c) because there was no need for it
 - d) because there was not enough wood

Answers: 1. (b) 2. (c) 3. (b) 4. (c) 5. (a) 6. (b) 7. (c)

