



## NEWSLETTER – FOURTH QUARTER 2008

Volume 3, Number 4

### INTRODUCTION

We at Waldo Wright's are a bunch of nostalgic people; we care about the past and want to keep the barnstorming dream alive. So, your humble editor Waldo, Sr., will compose a brief biography of a few past barnstormers who laid the groundwork for what we attempt to keep alive today and place in future newsletters. Some names you may recognize and some are not so familiar, but none-the-less important. A few names I am considering are Ed Nibur, Clyde "Upside-Down" Pangborn, Elmer "Uncle Buck" Leighton, Douglas Davis, Mabel Cody, Jimmy and Jessie Woods, Frank Clarke and probably others that I will later recall. You can see by the number of names this will be a daunting task to locate information on each and compose an outline of the person complete with pictures. The Internet is an amazing tool for the researcher because one can find photos if you know how to search. I will also use a number of books and publications to locate data. I do have an autobiography of the late Ed Nibur provided me by his son Paul. That one will be one of the easiest to compose. Elmer Leighton's grandson Christopher Strauss has provided me with two discs with pictures and stories about his grandfather. Elmer's story will be very interesting and will appear in a future newsletter. So here we go!

### Clyde "Upside-Down" Pangborn

Clyde Edward Pangborn was born October 28, 1894 in Bridgeport, Washington. "Pang" learned to fly at a young age and when the United States entered WW1, Pangborn served as a flight instructor for the U.S Army at Ellington Field in Houston, Texas. The only training aircraft available at the time was the Curtiss JN-4 "Jenny" biplane. His military



flying career was uneventful, however he did acquire a rather unique skill. He taught himself to slowly roll his plane on its back and fly upside-down for a short time, at least until the engine quit from fuel starvation. His fellow pilots began calling him "Upside-Down Pang," a name that would stick with him for the rest of his life. Ultimately his nickname was shortened to "Upside-Down" or just "Pang."

When the war finally ended in 1918, most aviators of the day wanted to use their skills as aviators to earn money. There were surplus “Jenny” ships that could be purchased at bargain prices, so these aviators bought these ships and set out across the states performing aerial shows. This was called “Barnstorming” and it became a popular form of entertainment. Along with the aerial shows the barnstormers gave rides to those in attendance who could afford 50-cents to 5-dollars.

Pangborn would attempt all sorts of aerial tricks to draw a crowd. One of his first stunts was at Coronado Beach, California, May 16, 1920. During the stunt Pang was supposed to transfer from a speeding car onto a rope ladder that was attached to a Jenny biplane. Although Pang grabbed the ladder, he lost his grip and fell to the ground. Fortunately he was on a sand surface and suffered three dislocated vertebra and some bruises and muscle strains. This would be the only serious accident of his flying career, hard to believe but true!



By 1921 Pangborn tired of traveling by himself and was offered a partnership with Ivan Gates to form the Gates Flying Circus. Pang was part owner, chief pilot and operations manager. The troupe, equipped with several ships, toured internationally and became famous as the largest barnstorming operation in its time. One of the key stunts Pangborn performed was to change planes in flight to compliment his wing-walking escapades. Pangborn flew countless hours during his barnstorming days without sustaining any serious injuries or causing injuries to his many paying passengers.

Right, a Gates Flying Circus Standard J-1 biplane on the beach at Daytona Beach, Florida. Gates operated the largest flying circus of the day. The operation was divided into troupes of 4-ships, pilots and mechanics. Based in Lodi, New Jersey, these troupes would criss-



cross the United States introducing the public to the flying machine, stunting and hauling rides.

**GATES FLYING CIRCUS**

**DEATH DEFYING AERIAL ANTICS**

FEATURING

**DIAVALO**

Stunt Flying  
Wing Walking  
Sky Vaudeville  
Aerial Acrobatics

America's King of the Air  
**CLYDE E. PANGBORN**  
World's Master Aviator

Lieut. C. P. **CLEVINGER**  
"The Wizard of the Air"

"LOOP KING" **BILLY BROOKS**  
Famous Exhibition Flyer

TIME	PLACE	ADMISSION
3 P. M.	LOCAL AVIATION FIELD	25c

When the Gates Flying Circus arrived in a town the ships flew around the dumped handbills announcing their show. Left is shown one of Gates' handbills that were scattered by the thousands wherever they traveled. The word "Diavalo" was placed on posters and handbills that identified the wing walker and parachutist. Rather than put the name of the brave soul on the handbill they used the word "Diavalo," so in case the person was killed or injured it would render the advertisement inaccurate. By identifying the daredevil as "Diavalo," posters could be printed in advance and used for long periods of time.

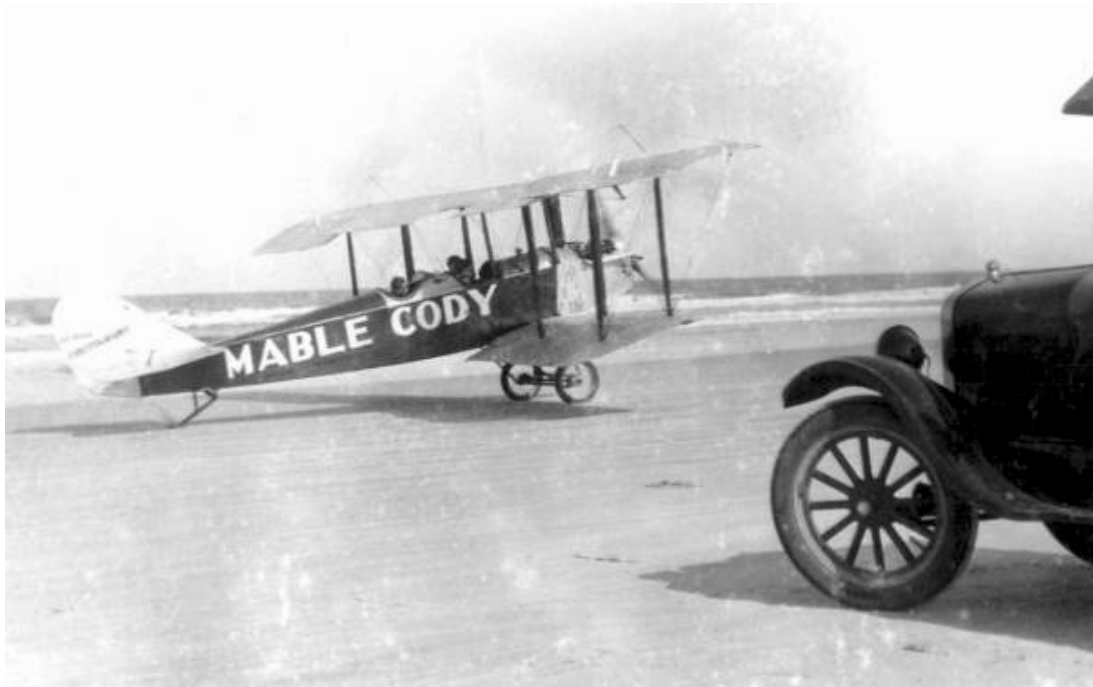
However, like most barnstormers of that era, Pangborn's stunting days with the Gates Circus was limited because of safety regulations from the newly created Aeronautics Branch of the Department of Commerce. After 1926, barnstormers found it more-and-more difficult to meet the new standards set forth by the government and aerial shows began to disappear. The Gates Flying Circus dissolved in 1928; its final days were the return of the ships to the Lodi home base. Although Pang would work with other shows, each of them would cease to exist. In 1931 Pangborn's barnstorming career would end. The era of the barnstormer was over, as government inspectors would not stand for their aerial antics that posed a danger to the public. The Aeronautics Department even grounded their wooden airplanes

because they were unairworthy and worn out. Pangborn joined the New Standard Flying

Service, being named as Chief Pilot. Here he tested and flew the “next generation” barnstorming airplane – the New Standard D-25 designed by Charles Healy Day and constructed in Paterson, New Jersey.

### **Mabel Cody**

Mabel Cody was the niece of Wild West showman “Buffalo” Bill Cody and a headstrong stuntwoman. She organized her Flying Circus in the southeast portion of the United States in 1925. The Mabel Cody Flying Circus offered such stunts such as wing walking, auto to plane transfers, boat to plane transfers both with and without the use of ladders and parachute drops. Although not a pilot, her circus performed at fairs as well as events organized by real estate developers, particularly in the state of Florida during its development. One promoter hired the circus to attract potential land and homebuyers to Coral Gables, Florida. In competition with another flying circus operated by Douglas Davis, the two flying circuses battled for paying customers throughout the South.



Always in competition with Doug Davis’ Flying Circus, their rivalry continued as they barnstormed through Georgia and Alabama during the early days of flying.

One of Mabel’s favorite stunts was to transfer from a speeding boat to a rope ladder attached to a Curtiss Jenny flying close formation. She was the first woman to perform this stunt, however she had survived a previous attempt during which the plane crashed and the boat caught fire! Her stunt was performed on lakes and along the Atlantic Coast, wherever she could drum up an audience.



Above, Mabel Cody successfully transfers from a speeding boat to her Curtiss Jenny biplane off the coast of St. Augustine, Florida in 1926. As the rivalry between Cody and Davis continued, Davis tried his best to lure her pilots away. He arrived in a town where she was to perform just hours before her entrance. She fought back by bringing her flying circus into towns Davis had scheduled a day before he arrived, thus emptying the pockets of money they would have spent on Davis. However in the end she joined forces with him as costars of an air show to promote a candy bar - the Doug Davis Baby Ruth Flying Circus.



On March 24, 1924 Mabel fell from an altitude of 50 feet while performing an auto to plane transfer stunt. Mabel suffered a dislocated shoulder and a broken forearm. The circus disbanded shortly after the accident. Mabel joined the Douglas Davis and his Baby Ruth Flying Circus after she recovered.

Right, Douglas Davis standing on the wing of his ground-looped Curtiss Jenny at Candler Field near Atlanta, Georgia. Not all landings went smoothly, even for experienced aviators.

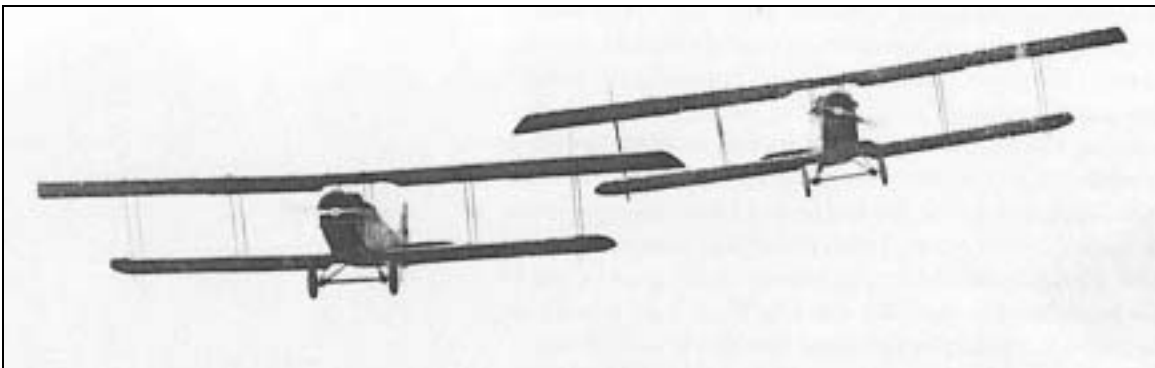


## OMER LOCKLEAR

As barnstorming began to wane, some of the aviators migrated to Hollywood, California and the movie business. They flew as stunt pilots and performed their aerial antics for the cameras. One such individual was Omer Locklear. Locklear joined the Army Air Service on October 25, 1917 at the age of 26. He became an instant celebrity within months, being bored with just flying he began to climb out of the cockpit and walk around the wings of a Curtiss Jenny training ship piloted by a fellow officer. Thus Locklear became one of the first of the wing walkers and eventually resigned from the Air Service to take his skills



to Hollywood. Arriving in Hollywood midsummer 1919 his aerial feats were exploited before the movie cameras and he was cast in several films. He earned as much as \$3,000 per week, lived in the city's fancy hotels, performed for vast crowds and became a Hollywood celebrity. Locklear became enamored with Hollywood celebrities as he rubbed shoulders with the heroes and heroines of the silent screen. He responded by diving his flying machine on motion picture lots and studios, running his wheels over the curved roofs of their indoor stages – a stunt that became known as the “Locklear Bounce.”



Above, Omer Locklear performs his “Dance of Death,” in which he and another fearless aviator flew with their wing tips overlapping. Then they walked out on the wings and exchanged places. The aircraft are the old faithful Curtiss JN-4 “Jenny.” It was not uncommon to find Locklear landing on Cahuenga Boulevard to pick up a young starlet after work and then landing on a nearby beach to join her for a dip.

## DIAVALO

The modern dictionary does not give a definition for the word “diavalo,” but when applied to the barnstormers it meant a daredevil stunt man or woman. The word was derived because there were many fatalities associated with wing walking and other aerial antics performed by these brave souls. They rarely wore parachutes or any other safety devices, so if a person fell it was certain death.

Omer Locklear was amongst the first to leave a cockpit of a flying machine to venture out



onto its wings. Locklear perfected his daring stunt while serving in the Army Air Service and took his antics directly to Hollywood. The barnstormers copied Locklear’s feats to draw attention to their shows, where they charged an admission fee and sold rides. Left is photo of Locklear standing on upper wing of a Curtiss Jenny, most

likely somewhere over Hollywood, California.

Rather than place the stunt person’s name on posters that were printed in large numbers for distribution announcing a flying circus air show, the word diavalo was inserted. That



way, if the brave soul died or quit the business the poster was still valid.

Left is “Diavalo” Aaron “Duke” Krantz of the Gates Flying Circus performing by hanging from a ladder suspended below a Standard J-1 ship. Krantz was a mechanic for the circus and was charged with keeping the rickety wooden airplanes flying. When there was a need for someone to do wing walking chores, Krantz volunteered. He charged \$2.50 for

wing walking and performed parachute jumps for \$5.00. Krantz proved to be so durable that Ivan Gates billed him as A. F. Krantz, "World's Master Daredevil." A quote of Krantz in the book, "Barnstormers and Speed Kings," states, "We had a trapeze that I attached to the landing gear with a mouthpiece and I used to go down and hang from that by my teeth. Of course it had a big ball on the end that filled your entire mouth. I used to slide back on the tail and stand on my head, and doing that I had no support at all!"

Right, a parachute jump by a Diavalo. The parachute had just been invented; therefore this stunt was a real crowd pleaser. The stunt usually began with the Diavalo climbing out onto the lower wing and standing on the trailing edge while holding on to the interplane strut. He would then pull the ripcord;



the chute would open and drag him off the wing. Sometimes the Diavalo would wear two chutes and, after a short fall, would release the first chute and enter a free fall. The crowd would think he was going to die, when the second chute would open and he would glide to a landing in front of them.



Above, a Diavalo after successfully landing on terra firma. He lived to tell the tale and jump another day. These brave souls were generally paid a fee for each jump, usually around \$5.

Right, aerialist Ethyl Dare on wing of Jenny. Note pegs on strut to aid in climbing to upper wing. Oh, these were the days!



## THE FOLKS WE MEET

Spring break, April 16, 2008 we met the family of Kevin and Dara Oliver from Sackets Harbor, New York. As the old saying goes “a photo is worth a thousand words,” I present their A-Darable Photos of their outing with us. They all loved it!



Left, getting dressed for the flight with Waldo. Ms. Jill places helmet and goggles on Delaney while Kavanagh observes. The kids were really excited about flying in an open cockpit biplane!

Below, the family is ready and so is the New Standard for the adventure of a lifetime. All that is needed is Waldo, the aviator!

Below left, seated comfortably in the roomy front cockpit of the New Standard, we are ready to taxi for a new adventure.



Below right, there's Waldo doing his “thing” in the rear seat. An enjoyable time had by all!



Dear Bob -

I just got back from a 4 day trip and wanted to get this out to you for your newsletter. It was so nice of you to add our family photos to your web site and I will try to fill you in on our trip to Florida and the positive impact flying with you had on my family.

On April 16, 2008 we came to Fantasy of Flight the day after our daughter, Delaney Enya turned 6. She got to swim with the dolphins at Marineland for her birthday gift and we stayed in Flagler Beach. Years before this trip I stayed in Flagler where I received my ATE multi-engine Seaplane rating in a Twin Bee. The ride in the new Standard was our daughter's first trip in an airplane other than a jet liner and our 7 year old son Kavanagh's third. I was lucky enough to have been hired at SouthWest Airlines as a First Officer (co-pilot) on the 737 at the time of 9-11. Before that as a very young pilot I started Aerial Dimensions, a Banner Towing, Flight Instruction and Seaplane business based in my hometown of Sackets Harbor, NY which is located 3 hours north of Albany on Lake Ontario near the Canadian Border. Like Rob and you - My father and I worked as a team along with my mother doing the books and my fiancé Dara endlessly putting banners together and selling Seaplane tickets. At one time or another I owned a J-3 Cub, J-5, PA-12 on wheels and floats, a Tri-Pacer, a Pawnee, a few C-172's, a C-206 an-fib, an Arrow and a Beech Sundowner.

But, in 1995 at the age of 29 I lost my best friend...when my Dad passed away and although the business was continuing to be successful, I decided to sell the company and fly for someone else, as the fun of Aircraft ownership had left me with my father's passing. After flying C-208 floatplanes in and out of the East River in New York City and Beavers and Otters in Ketchikan, Alaska I was hired by a small commuter airline flying SAAB 340's and later Regional Jets before coming to SouthWest Airlines.

Although I had thought of and had told many hair raising stories of my past flying experiences to other SWA pilots, I didn't feel the urge for the old tailwheel and stick flying until I flew with you, the joy I saw on my family's faces and their amazement afterward was so rewarding.

I am now buying in on a EAA owned J-5 Cub to start flying again with my children and introduce the love of aviation to them, just as my father had done for me many years before.

Thank You -

Kevin and Clan Oliver  
Dara, Kavanagh & Delaney Enya

I received this very nice email with photos from a young couple we met recently. The memo explains all.

Dear Waldo;

My boyfriend proposed to me just before we rode in one of your biplanes last February 29th. With all of my wedding planning stuff I just came across your business card and remembered you had asked us to send a couple of the pictures. Sorry it took me so long, but here they are.

We are going to be married in Hawaii this September. Thank you so much for making that such a special day for us. It was an experience I will never forget!

Sincerely,  
Amy Killingsworth & Zach Brown



We at Waldo Wright's wish Amy and Zach all the best in their married life. May your dreams come true and may you share a long life together.

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