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INTRODUCTION

In the last issue we met some early barnstormers who perfected the art of taking aloft passengers, wing walking, transferring from ship to ship while in flight and parachute jumping. In this issue we meet more early barnstormers such as Ed Nibur, Bill Brooks, and Jack Ashcroft. Much of history of these early aviators has been lost, but with the advent of the Internet it is possible to locate historical facts and memories of these brave souls that came before we modern day barnstormers. I feel particularly fortunate to have met Ed Nibur and his wife Lillian and his son Paul and wife Noella. Paul has provided me with an autobiography written by his father, which is very revealing in every detail of early flying in the United States. I am sure you will find it interesting and will want to learn more as space is limited and the entire story cannot be told at this time.

ED NIBUR

In this segment I will rely totally on words written by Ed. Rob and I were fortunate to have met Ed and Lillian at their home in Clovis, California a few years ago. We looked at Ed and Lillian's scrapbook; we had never seen so much data on the New Standard D-25 and early barnstorming as this book contained. Lillian had kept it as Ed barnstormed around Pennsylvania, particularly the Reading area. So here is the story in Ed's words. Portions of the autobiography are reproduced with the permission of Ed's son Paul, a retired United Air Lines Boeing 777 captain. Incidentally, both Ed and Paul were captains for United Air Lines, Ed starting in Boeing 247 and Douglas DC-3 aircraft and retiring in Douglas DC-8 jets. Paul began in the Boeing 737 and retired in a new Boeing 777 aircraft. The journey of Ed and Paul, father and son both flying with United Air Lines is a story in itself. The following is the story written in Ed's words, which appear in italics.

"My first flight took place on April 30, 1928. The airplane was a World War One training plane, named a Jenny, with an 8-cylinder, water-cooled, 90 horsepower engine. There were no instruments except a tachometer to check the engine performance before takeoff and while flying. We didn't have an airspeed indicator so my instructor said 'listen to the wires' for the sound they make." Ed soloed May 24, 1928 and put in another 14-hours of solo flight. At that time a big decision was made. "Dad and I decided that we would buy an airplane to put in the 200-hours of solo required for a

commercial license, and then sell it when I could get a job. I received my OX-5 Travel Air July 1928 and was awarded my Commercial license #3693 September 8, 1928. This permitted me to fly nationally for hire. The next day I started giving student instruction. My first student was a New York policeman. I was charging 15-dollars per hour and on my way to earning some money. I continued with this routine, occasionally flying other



planes such as an Arrow Sport, Waco, Swallow, Warner Cessna, Curtiss Robin, Doyle Oriole, and many others. On June 9, 1929 I sold the Travel Air to a taxi drivers son for \$2,000. We paid \$3,600 for it

in July 1928. So my cost of building up my time to obtain my license was \$1,600. Of course I earned some income and paid for fuel and maintenance during this time. So I turned the check over to my Dad, and he said, 'from now on you are on your own,' and so I was!"

In April 1929, Ivan Gates, the owner of the Gates Air Circus started operating sightseeing flights at Holmes Airport in Flushing, N.Y. He had two old WWI Standards with Hisso engines. They carried four passengers in front, pilot in the rear. They looked like old Jennies. They did a good job when they didn't have mechanical problems. Ed worked for Gates from June 5, 1929 to August 1, 1929. Ed recalls, "Mr. Gates luck changed when he was notified that his old Standards would no longer be licensed to carry passengers for hire. The reason was given that the old wooden fuselages were unsafe and out of date. On August 1, 1929, Major Bill Brooks, our manager, told me that the Gates operation was closing and asked if I would like to join him in the operation of a Barnstorming Air Circus. I said YES!"



Above, Empire Flying Circus and their New Standard D-25 biplanes.

The operation now became the "Empire Air Circus." Major Bill Brooks was formerly an Army flight instructor. The airplanes we will be flying are New Standards, with model J5 engines. This airplane is a 5-place, open cockpit, four seats in front, and the pilot flies from a seat in the rear. It is a biplane with a wingspread of 46-feet upper wing, and the lower wing, 36-feet. It was designed to take off and land on 1,000 foot runway, minimum, with low obstructions, on either end. After doing a few landings, I was ready to fly passengers from Syracuse, N.Y.

"Our first flight was what Bill called a 'Bally' flight, short for ballyhoo, to fly over town, make a lot of noise with loops and spins over the edge of town, to attract the attention of the people down there, then flying back to the field, to give them the direction to where we were. By the time they arrived we would have our fence up to hold the crowd back away from the plane. Our ticket box would be in place ready for the customers, our ticket seller would be yelling, 'Flights One Dollar, Two and a half, or Five dollars.' Then we would do our thing.

We then went on to do our thing at the following places, Fulton, N.Y. Three days later Auburn, then Cortland, Norwich, Rome, Amsterdam, Glens Falls, and Troy N.Y on August 26. The crowd at Troy was so immense there, I flew 166 flights and carried 666 passengers on one day, one dollar each passenger."

Ed continued to barnstorm with the Empire Air Circus until the depression. Ed recalls, "10/30/29 the bottom fell out of the stock market. The owner of the Empire Air Circus went broke and we were out of jobs. Ed took a job ferrying airplanes, having returned to Curtiss Field meeting up with a fellow named "Travel Air Brown," who had sold him his first airplane. In 1930, Bill Brooks suggested they each purchase an airplane and go back to barnstorming. Ed remembers, "I broached the idea to Dad and he agreed. On 4/7/30 I took delivery of NC3000, a used New Standard D-25. While at Teterboro Airport, where I kept my plane, I met Dick Estler. I hired him to be my mechanic and general



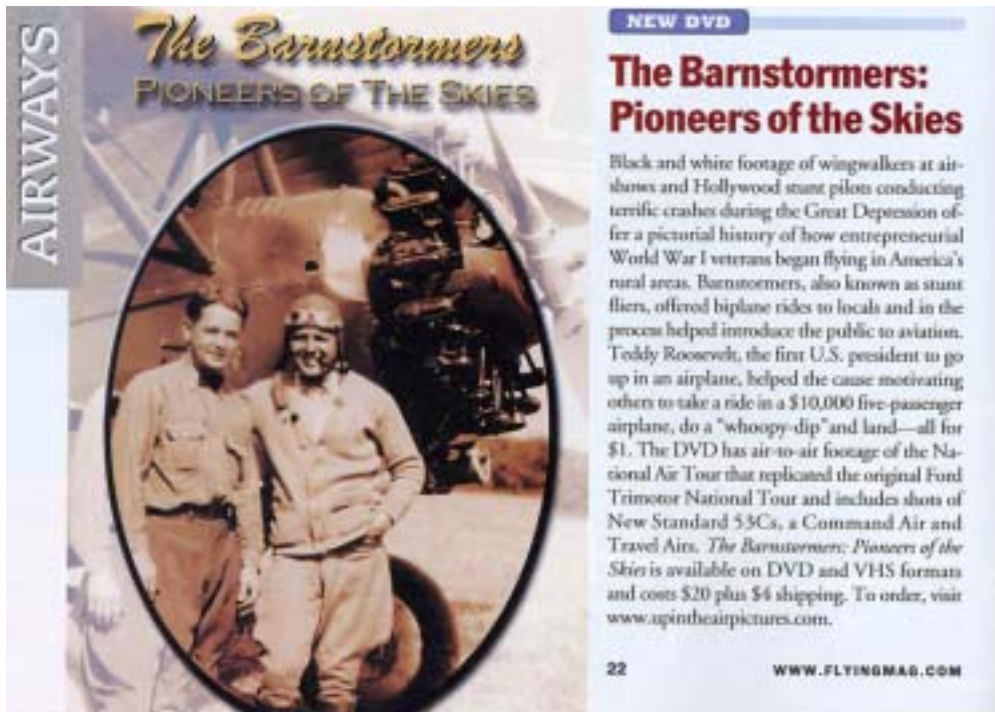
handy man. Our first stop was Millville, N.J, then on to Woodbury, and at Martinsburg, W.Va, we were joined by Bill Brooks with his airplane (a New Standard D-25). We were now the Goodwill Flyers." Left, Ed Nibur and his New Standard D-25, NC3000.

Ed continued to barnstorm until March 31, 1933 when he opened a charter, flight instruction and ride hopping business at the Teterboro Airport. While at Teterboro, Ed has some famous visitors. Ed remembers, *"In April (1931) we had a visit from two famous people; Frank Hawks, who broke coast to coast speed records in 1932, and Bernt Balchen, President of Scandinavian Airways, who left the next day to explore the Antarctic continent. Amelia Earhart stopped by one day, asked me to join her in her Franklin convertible. We ate chocolates and had a pleasant talk.*

One of my fondest memories is filling a request by Paul Nibur to speak at the Clovis (CA) Rotary Club regarding my barnstorming activities. Paul brought Ed and Lillian to listen. So in the same room were a modern day barnstormer and an original 1930 barnstormer. I asked Ed to add a couple of his stories, which he gladly shared. It was a wonderful afternoon.

Note: for those interested in early and modern day barnstormers, you may want to purchase a very nice DVD. It is available from your humble newsletter editor (waldo997e@aol.com) or from the producers: (<http://www.upintheairpictures.com/pages/review.html>).

Below, the cover from the video produced by my friends Chuck Carson and Michael McMaster. If you like barnstorming adventures, you'll like this. A nice interview with Ed Nibur is included. That is Ed on cover standing next to his New Standard, NC3000. This is a keeper and a great addition to any collection. There are new other new and exciting programs in the making at this time. You will want to stay in touch with the website.



MAJOR BILL BROOKS

Like most early fliers of the time, they were trained by the United States Signal Corps and either went into combat or became flight instructors. Such was Major William Brooks. And when the war was over they sought flying jobs to make a living because of the excitement and adventure. The Gates Flying Circus produced a large number of aviators that would eventually become famous.

Right, aviator Bill Brooks and his Gates Standard at Teterboro in 1928.

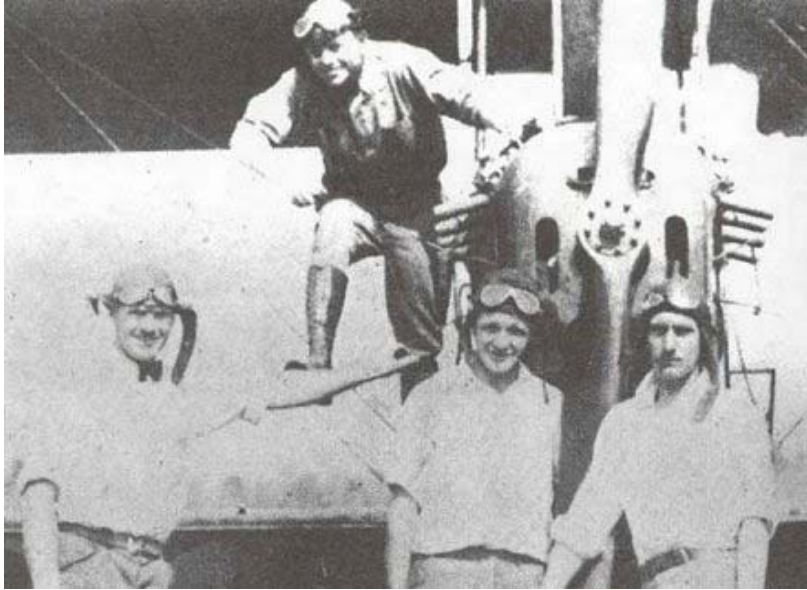


The Ivan Gates Flying Circus was perhaps the most traveled of all of the major barnstorming acts. It toured almost every state in the union and traveled quite extensively internationally. Gates and his colleagues were famous not only for

their stunts but also for having started the one-dollar-joy ride. This ride was so popular that in a single day, Bill Brooks, one of Gates' pilots, took 980 passengers up for rides during a show in Steubenville, Ohio. Each ride was only 1-2 minutes long, which meant Brooks did many takeoffs and landings. One must keep in mind that events like this were happening just 2-years after Charles Lindbergh flew non-stop from Roosevelt Field, Long Island, New York to Paris, France in his Ryan monoplane "Spirit of St. Louis." The aeroplane was very intriguing to a fascinated public and even in hard monetary times people would spring for a dollar joy ride. It is estimated that the Gates Flying Circus carried as many as 1,000,000 people in their ships from 1921-1929. By 1924, the Gates Flying Circus included 3-stuntmen and 3-pilots; Clyde Pangborn, A. R. "Tommy" Thompson and William C. "**Whispering Bill**" Brooks, a loud talking ex Army aviator.

JOHN W. "JACK" ASHCRAFT

Jack Ashcraft was born in 1897 in Protection, Kansas, graduating from high school in 1916. Ashcraft was mechanically inclined and after graduation turned his focus to auto mechanics, later taking up motorcycle and auto racing. When the United States entered WW1 he immediately enlisted in the motorcycle corps of the Army and was soon sent overseas where he served with distinction and bravery as a motorcycle dispatch rider. When hostilities ceased Ashcraft returned home and turned his attention to aviation and took up training as an airplane mechanic and pilot. He soon received his pilot's license and within a few years had become nationally known in aviation circles. He joined the Gates Flying Circus where he was a stunt pilot and hauled passengers for the Gates "dollar a ride" campaign.



Left to right, John W. “Jack” Ashcraft, Errett Williams, West Mechanic and Ives McKinney with Gates Standard J-1 ship in background. The troupe was operating in the Carolinas in 1926. Photo left is from Cindy Weigand.

While flying for Gates, Ashcraft made a point of cutting his ignition switch in flight, landing

and coasting up to the corral containing people for the next flight with a dead engine. At times, when business was slow, he would blow a bugle to attract attention of those on the ground. Besides being an excellent aviator he was also a showman.



A Gates troupe with five Standard J-1’s at Williamsport, Pennsylvania in 1927.

Left to right: Charles (Slim) West, Jack Ashcraft, (unknown), Duke Krantz, Clyde Pangborn, Van Gates, (unknown), Samuel (Buck) Steele, (unknown), Mickey Efferson, Al McClatchie, (unknown), George Daws, Eddie Brooks, (unknown), and Shorty Bittner. Photo courtesy Cindy Weigand (Jack Ashcraft’s great niece).

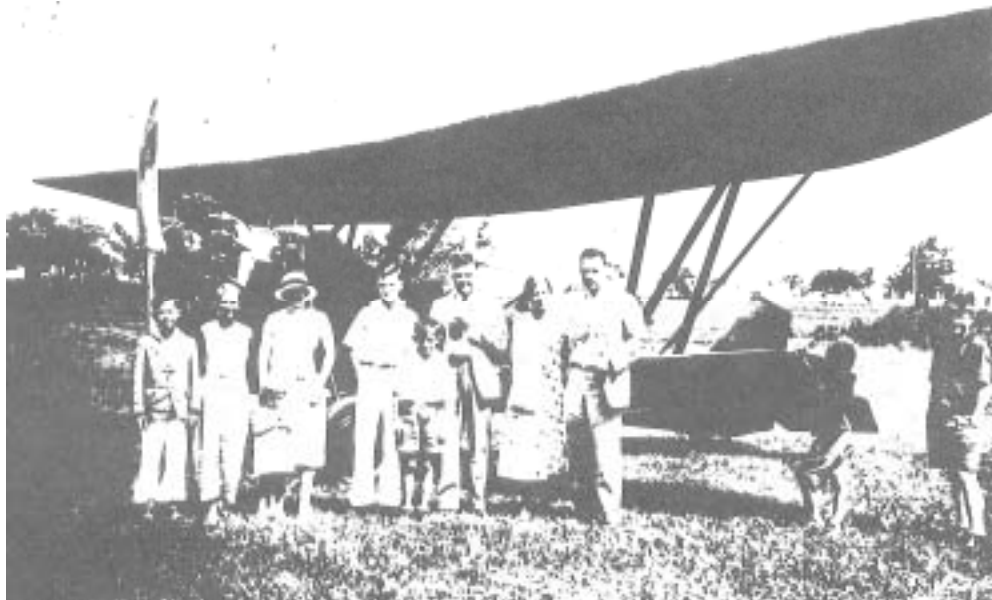
In 1929, with government regulations continuing to shut down barnstorming operations, the last touring troupe of the once mighty Gates Flying Circus returned to their home in Teterboro, New Jersey. Four remaining circus flyers, veterans Bill Brooks, Ives McKinney, Jack Ashcraft and Homer Fackler flew into the field with Ivan Gates and Clyde Pangborn watching. They executed five precision formation loops over the field and each aviator displayed their best individual aerobatics, moving Gates to tears as they landed.

Bill Brooks did one more loop and came in last. They taxied smartly to form a line, flipped back their goggles and cut the ignition switches. That was the end of the famous Gates Flying Circus. It had just ceased to exist!



Right, Homer Fackler carries 4-passengers in New Standard D-25 for the New Standard Flying Service, Teterboro, New Jersey. The once mighty Gates Flying Circus had ceased to exist at this time.

Some barnstormers were famous aviators and some were obscure local pilots trying to make a living in the flying business. Next, a photo sent in by Mr. William (Bill) Gutermuth of Newtonville, New York. Mr. Gutermuth writes, *“Here is the photo I promised you last year. This was one month before the market crash of '29.*



Only my sister Frances, second from left alive at 90-years, me at 86. Cole Palen, in 1984 told me there was a flying group in Hampton, New Hampshire who occasionally flew their New Standard down to Rhinebeck and bombed him with fake bombs (smoke).” On the backside of the photo copy Bill writes, “Hampton, NH, 79 years ago. New Standard, pilot Alfred Desjardin (not shown). Bill Gutermuth, age 7 years, in front with shorts standing at left wing tip with family and friends. Showed this photo to Cole Palen; couldn’t find the N-number.” Many thanks for sending photo and story Bill. Any readers who may have old photos of barnstormers are welcomed to send to us here at Waldo Wright’s for future reference.

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