

EDWARD A. STINSON:

Early Wright Exhibition Pilot - Instructor - Plane Manufacturer

by Harold E. Morehouse¹

Edward A. Stinson was born in Fort Payne, Ala., July 11, 1894, a brother of Katherine (1891-1977) and Marjorie Stinson (1896-1975). After helping his sisters in their early flying exploits, and observing their renown and successes, he decided to get into the game himself.

During that time his sisters reportedly gave him some instruction, but later he decided to take a course at the Wright School, so he enrolled and started there around September 20, 1915. His instructor was Roderick Wright, assisted at times by Howard Rinehart. He finished his instruction in late November, but did not fly for his license tests at that time. Returning to San Antonio, he joined his sisters, who were operating the Stinson School of Aviation and had established their own flying field. Shortly after this he started to build a new tractor plane for exhibition and school work. On December 29, 1915, he obtained License No. 375 flying one of the school planes.

Stinson remained in San Antonio that winter and continued his activities there, then on April 28, 1916, flew over San Antonio during a local *Flower Day* celebration. Later that spring he moved north with his sisters and they established headquarters at Ashburn Field, Chicago, Ill., to fly exhibitions for the summer throughout the middle west. He was then flying a new tractor airplane capable of doing loops with 50-hp Gnome engine, which Walter Brock of Chicago had helped him design

and build, and during midsummer he began looping this plane in exhibition flights. He and E. M. Laird flew many exhibitions together that season, with Bud Snyder as his mechanic. In mid-October he left Ashburn Field to fill a series of dates in the southwest before returning to San Antonio where the Stinsons spent the winter operating their school. He was then instructor-president of the school and their mother was the business manager. Together with his sisters he trained a number of Canadians who later entered the Royal Air Force in WWI.



Edward A. Stinson

On April 20, 1917, he established a new passenger looping record of 34 consecutive loops, with Mrs. Robin Gray of Norfolk, Va., as passenger. In June he made an extensive trip around the country, dropping paper bombs and appealing for Red Cross funds. At this time he began doing some flight testing of various new planes and early in July flew the tests in a new military tractor

airplane for the Wittemann-Lewis Co. of Newark, N.J., at a government field on Long Island. Shortly after this, Stinson responded to a call from the government for flight instructors and was stationed at the Hampton Roads Aviation Station in Virginia, where he accepted a commission and became first lieutenant in the Air Service. In July he and Carl Batts looped a large twin-motor double float seaplane twice at Newport News, Virginia. Late that summer he was transferred to Love Field, Texas, and there set up another loop record of 143 times.

¹ This profile of Edward Stinson is part of a collection of early aviation pioneers profiles by the late Harold E. Morehouse. During the late 1950s and 1960s, Morehouse started a project to create biographical sketches of all the early American aviators (those that flew before WWI). As an AAHS member about, 20 of these profiles were published in the AAHS *Journal*. Realizing that publishing two to three profiles an issue in a quarterly publication would take well into the 21st century, he changed his goal to publish them in book – a goal that unfortunately he was not able to see to fruition.

In total, Morehouse, with the assistance of his wife and Paul Garber (NASM) compiled 346 profiles, copies of which were provided to both the Curtiss Museum and the National Air and Space Museum. In addition, in Morehouse's uncataloged files at the NASM is a handwritten document containing another 60 names of early aviators that Morehouse intended to profile.

The AAHS has been working quietly to assemble, fact check, edit and produce this collective work in honor of both an early aviation pioneer and former AAHS member. If you have the time and inclination to help move this project forward, please contact Hayden Hamilton, AAHS Managing Editor: (email: webmaster@aahs-online.org)



Eddie Stenson and Lloyd Bertaud established a new endurance record at the end of 1921 of 26 hours, 19 minutes, in a Junkers-Larsen JL-6. (Photo from the AAHS archives)

He was later transferred to Kelley Field where he remained through 1918. In April 1918 he took Rod Law up for a parachute jump demonstration at Kelley Field. In August he made a flying weekend trip to visit his mother, landing on her farm at Alamo Heights, Texas.

After WWI, the Stinsons continued to operate their flying school at San Antonio during winter months. In the spring of 1919 Eddie started barn-storming around the country and testing new experimental planes for various companies. In late March 1919 he tested the new Ace Scout for the Aircraft Engineering Co. of New York located on Long Island. On May 1 he flew a JN-4 from Queens, Long Island, to Atlantic City, N.J., with Lt. G.W. Shaw as passenger, to attend the Pan-American Aeronautic Convention. Katherine and Marjorie were there and they did considerable flying during the event. On May 10 he took up Lt. Jean Ors of France for a parachute demonstration. In 1919 he formed the Stinson Airplane Syndicate to develop and produce a new airplane.

In early spring of 1920, Eddie introduced the Stinson Greyhound by flying from Dayton, Ohio, to Mineola, Long Island. It was a two-place, side-by-side biplane, using a Curtiss OX engine, however, the market for planes was not yet mature and the Greyhound venture was not a success. Through 1920 and 1921 he continued to do barnstorming and test flying for other companies and when J.L. Larsen formed the J. L. Aircraft Co. in New York in late 1921 to import the Junkers-built JL-6 and JL-12 all-metal cabin monoplanes, Eddie did considerable flying for him on the first planes brought to the United States. On December 30, 1921, he and Lloyd Bertaud established a new endurance record of 26 hours, 19 minutes, in a JL-6 at Roosevelt Field, Long Island. They covered an estimated 2,200 miles circling about Long Island and vicinity. He acquired a JL-6 plane and used it for some time while barnstorming and

eventually located in Detroit, Michigan.

In 1922, Eddie started an airline between Detroit and Cleveland using the JL-6, which he operated for a time. During 1923-1924 he and "Bill" Mara were flying this plane at Selfridge Field. He was also owner of a tire station in downtown Detroit. In May 1925, Eddie secured the Michigan Fliers Field for the season, to carry passengers, make cross-country flights and give student instruction. He still had the JL-6 in addition to a Liberty-6 Standard and a JN-4 for the season.

Early in 1926 the name of the Stinson Aircraft Syndicate was changed to the Stinson Aircraft Corp., Northville, Mich., and the Stinson Detrouer was introduced. This aircraft was an enclosed, sound-proofed cabin biplane with a Wright Whirlwind engine, a cabin heater, starter and brakes. In this new plane he carried many well-known aviation personages, flying with his hat and coat off and sleeves rolled up in typical Michigan March weather. His passengers rode in comfort in the heated cabin and clad in no extra clothing, able to carry on a normal conversation. The plane made a great impression and was an immediate success, launching Stinson on his way toward bigger things. In 1926 his new company built and sold 10 of these planes, some to newly formed airlines.

In March 1927 three were sold to Northwest Airways for air-mail service, and that same month he flew one to Miami, Fla., and return on a publicity trip. Also that month two were sold to Sir George H. Wilkins for his projected Arctic expedition, and on March 28 his first company advertisement was shown in *AVIATION* magazine. On May 2 he exhibited two planes at the All-American Aircraft Display at Bolling Field, Washington, D.C., one his standard Detrouer Cabin Biplane and the other an all-new five-place cabin monoplane with a Wright Whirlwind engine. This was the first of his long line of monoplanes to follow. On May 27 two Detrouers were sold to the well-known Detroit oil man, Ed. F. Schlee, who started an aerial taxi route out of Detroit. One each was sold to Horace and John Dodge, motor car manufacturers for executive use, one to Cliff Durant, auto race driver, one to the *Detroit News*, and several to others prominent in business. By this time it was clearly evident that he was making the greatest production and sales record in the history of commercial aviation.

On July 12, 1927, Eddie won first place in the Ford Reliability Tour, in a Detrouer. He then began to receive orders for special planes for record flight attempts. In late July he delivered one to Paul Redfern for a non-stop flight from Brunswick, Ga., to Reo de Janeiro, Brazil, in addition to one for Ed. F. Schlee and William Brock, who intended to make a trip around the world. Redfern started on August 25 from Brunswick but was lost and never found. Between August 27 and September 14 Brock and Schlee flew from Harbor Grace, Newfoundland, to Tokyo, Japan, 12,295 miles, in 18 days.

By the end of August the factory had already delivered 35 planes that year. In September, two Canadians, Capt. Terry Tully and Lt. James Medcalf, took off from Harbor Grace,

Newfoundland, for London in a Detroit but were lost at sea. Later that month Eddie was a contestant in the New York-to-Spokane Air Derby, but was forced out of the race at Missoula, Mont., due to engine trouble. On October 12 Ruth Elder and George Haldeman were downed at sea after losing oil, on a flight from Roosevelt Field, Long Island, to Paris, France, in a Detroit, but fortunately were able to alight alongside a vessel northeast of the Azores and were rescued.

On March 28-30, 1928, Eddie and George Haldeman broke the world's endurance record in a Detroit by flying 53 hours, 36 minutes, at Jacksonville, Florida. In April the Stinson Junior was introduced at the Aircraft Show in Detroit, a three-place cabin monoplane with Warner 120-hp engine. His business continued to grow and in June he flew in the Ford Reliability Tour again, but did not win first place due to engine trouble. In September, the Packard Motor Car Co. purchased a Detroit equipped with their new radial aircraft Diesel engine for flight test work. In December Eddie announced plans for a large new factory and flying field at Wayne, Mich., and planned production facilities for five planes a day.

On July 6, 1929, Byron Newcomb and Roy Mitchell established an endurance record of 174 hours in a Detroit at Cleveland, Ohio, by refueling in the air. On October 12 of that year the Stinson Corp. was merged with the Cord Corporation.

In April 1930, a new 10-passenger trimotored transport plane was introduced using Lycoming engines, and by the

end of May, 51 planes had been delivered. His planes were good! Due to his extensive flying experience and his rigorous barnstorming days, Eddie knew when a plane was right and what was required in the construction to withstand constant, everyday use, and he had endured so much hardship in his earlier flying days he understood the need for the quiet, clean, upholstered comfort of his cabin planes in order to sell aviation to the public.

On January 26, 1932, Eddie had a bad accident while attempting to land in Jackson Park, Chicago, Ill., when demonstrating one of his planes. In the approach he struck a flagpole that he had not seen and crashed. He was seriously injured and died the next day. Surviving were his wife, sisters and brother. There were no children.

Well known and loved throughout the industry, the death of Edward Stinson was a tremendous loss to aviation and it is hard to imagine where his progress would have led had he lived. His was a life of hard work and well deserved success, and he was one of the greatest ambassadors of aviation the industry has ever had. During his career he flew many thousands of miles, and he and his planes held about every record in the book.

An Early Bird and Flying Pioneer, Edward A. Stinson is richly deserving of everlasting credit for his great faith and tireless efforts in the cause of aviation progress. His name appears on the Wright Memorial plaque at Dayton.➔

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