

Spirit of American Youth

By H. GLENN BUFFINGTON

Trans-continental record flights in the late 1920s by Charles Lindbergh, Arthur Goebel, Charles B. D. Collyer, Frank Hawks, Roscoe Turner and others, proved a challenge to the imagination of younger pilots throughout the country into the '30s. Even while some of the later flights were being made, one American youth was winging from coast to coast to win the prize offered by the American Society for the Promotion of Aviation for the first youth under 18 to solo across the continent. Richard E. James, only 17, of Flushing, New York, was the trail blazer, and during 1930 the record was broken four times. These junior pilots (less than 21 years of age) raced against Old Sol and Father Time in hanging up trans-continental flight records.

Dick James wrote of his epic flight, "I began flying in 1927 at what was then Curtiss Field at Mineola, Long Island. I started for California to make the flight on August 2, 1928 and landed in New York on December 15, 1928. I spent quite a bit of time at Wichita, Kansas at the factory and about two months in San Francisco in preparation. I flew a Travelair with a Siemens-Halske radial, 9 cylinder motor made in Germany and producing 125 horsepower." The plane was christened "The Spirit of American Youth" and "The Trail of the Air Mail" Route was flown across the mid-section of the country in 40:52 to reach New York City.

It has been rather disconcerting trying to trace down accurate flight times for flights subsequent to Dick James' and up to that of Stanley Boynton. They were flown from the New York area to the Los Angeles area and return. The young pilots usually flying during the daylight hours in two to three hour legs, crossed the country over a period of several days with only actual flight time being counted. The times recorded here came from periodicals or through press releases and in some instances, from the individual involved. A number of discrepancies were noted and, therefore, the most authoritative source was used.

Name and Home Address	Age	Date	Flight Time	
			East-West	West-East
Frank Goldsborough Jackson H'gts, N.Y.	19	May 1930	34:03	28:18
Edward Schneider Jersey City, N.J.	18	Aug 1930	29:41	27:19
Robert Buck Westfield, N.J.	16	Oct 1930	28:33	23:47
Stanley Boynton Lexington, Mass.	18	Oct-Nov 1930	23:56	20:29

Frank Goldsborough, schoolmate and close friend to Dick James, was the first junior pilot to fly the round trip. He used a Kinner powered Fleet which was named "American Boy". The name, about eight feet in width, graced the side of the fuselage. (Frank Goldsborough was killed the year following his cross-country flight while flying another man on a speaking tour in New England. His father, Bryce Goldsborough was lost on a trans-Atlantic attempt several years before with Mrs. Frances Grayson and her Sikorsky amphibian, "The Dawn.")

Eddie Schneider used a Cessna AW powered with a Warner 110 for his record flights and with the same airplane, NC 9092, racing number 21, he finished in

eight place in the 1930 National Air Tour. In 1931, he entered the Cessna in the National Air Derby from Santa Monica to Cleveland and again in the National Air Tour. Schneider finished the '31 Tour in third position behind the two leading Ford tri-motors.

Bob Buck used a Pitcairn, Wright J-5, named "Yankee Clipper" for his early record flights. After the trans-continental flights, he flew the plane from Newark to Havana in 14:17 and returned in approximately 13 hours. In August of 1932 he winged from Newark to Mexico City in 24:02 and then on to Los Angeles in 20:40. He entered the Cord Cup Race from Los Angeles to Cleveland that Fall and later used a Monocoupe in making some long distance flights. (Bob Buck is now a TWA pilot.)

Stanley Boynton, Transport #12857, flying a Cessna DC6A, Whirlwind, made a couple of impressive records. He left Rockland, Maine on October 17th and returned there November 9th with records in each direction. Regarding the checking of the flight, he wrote, "You check through the National Aeronautics Association and Federation Aeronautique Internationale in DuPont Circle, Washington, D. C. You have to become an active member to have the official check of your record. I did same through Western Union. Got airport managers to wire them upon my arrival and departure at each point."

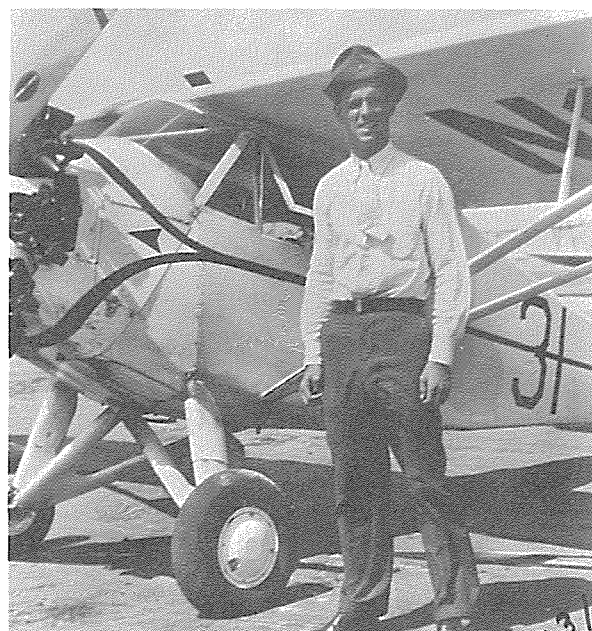
Gerald Nettleton, 20, of Toledo, Ohio, in a Warner-Monocoupe, made a noble effort to lower the mark several weeks later. However, he ran into adverse weather over the Laguna Mountains and was forced to bail out just 40 miles from his destination, San Diego. The following year he wrote, "I received my training in 1929 at the Lindbergh Field in San Diego. I finished out my 220 hours there and received my transport license. I guess there is no other reason why I took up aviation other than when it gets in your blood it is a pretty hard thing to drop. I don't think I will have a chance to try again at that record as I am now over the age limit which is 21 years." Time had run out for Jerry as it had for several other aspiring junior pilots who had reached the inevitable--adulthood. Undaunted, Nettleton acquired a second Monocoupe, Warner, NC 10730, racing number 31, and participated in the 1931 National Air Derby from Santa Monica to Cleveland.

A number of teenage girl pilots were busy making names for themselves during this era. Among others were Elinor Smith, Dorothy Hester and Evelyn Sharp. Elinor Smith of Freeport, New York, used a Bellanca Pacemaker for the most part in setting altitude (27,419 feet) and endurance (26:21) records and a Consolidated Fleetster in hanging up a new speed record. She teamed with Bobby Trout in December 1929 and established the first refueling endurance record for women, 45:05. The American Society for the Promotion of Aviation voted Elinor Smith the Best Woman Pilot in the Country, 1930.

Aerobatics were the forte of Dorothy Hester, a precision artist and student of Tex Rankin. She used a Great Lakes for her exhibition work and toured the country, starring at the Nationals. She rated with Laura Ingalls, Frances Harrell Marsalis and Florence Klingensmith as a top performer. At Omaha, Nebraska, in the Spring of 1931, she set the women's outside loop record (76) and the inverted barrel roll record (67). These records were made in a standard Great Lakes Sport Trainer--a wise choice judging from the longevity of the 'Lakes. Dorothy later returned to Portland, Oregon and established her own flying service.



Above, the Travelair "The Spirit of American Youth" in which pilot Richard E. James became the first youth under 18 to solo across the United States. At right, Gerald Nettleton poses before his Monocoupe, NC 10730, which he raced during 1931. (Photos - Buffington)



Evelyn Sharp of Ord, Nebraska was the country's youngest, female commercial pilot at 18 when she used an OX 5 Curtiss Robin in barnstorming the Midwest. Several years later, she instructed in the CPT program prior to becoming a WASP. (While serving as a WASP she was killed at Olmsted Army Air Field, Pennsylvania ferrying a Lockheed P-38.)

During this period, hundreds of youthful pilots were following in the footsteps of their forebears or striking out on their own "to do something new and different in an interesting vocation."

To mention a few--Aeroncas were used by Paul Clough, Garden City, New York and Kenneth Scholter, Hudson, Ohio in making their altitude record flights. Al K. Hall of Brooklyn, New York used a Bird for his ascent. Jack Alexander learned to fly in a DH Moth, taught by his mother, Mary C. Alexander of Lynchburg, Virginia who managed what was probably the first All-Women Air Show in November 1931 at Lynchburg's Preston Glenn Airport. Ben Epps, Jr., and his sister, Evelyn, followed their father into the air after he had built his own airplane at Athens, Georgia. Blanche Toney of Birmingham, Alabama, like Dorothy Hester, helped defray flying lessons

by making exhibition 'chute jumps.

Marvin Tuxhorn learned to fly at his father's flying school in Kansas City, the Blaine Tuxhorn School. Earl Reed attended the same school and at 15 he was their youngest student. Earl's father, Albert, had operated the first public airport in Kansas City, Kell-erstrass Airfield, during World War One. Betty Browning, another Kansas Citian used Inland Sports in garnering closed course racing experience before switching to Cessnas and some of the big-time air races.

Don Kelley had signed on with Rapid Air Transport in Omaha to do some grease-monkeying and to sprout wings. Under the tutelage of Bernard H. Pietenpol, designer of the famous homebuilt "Air Camper", a youthful trio had a start in flying at Spring Valley, Minn. They were F. J. "Doc" Salisbury of Sparta, Wisconsin, Don Finke and Oren Hoopman, both of Cherry Grove, Minn.

In Southern California, Frank Kurtz, Olympic diving star, had learned to fly and he proceeded to hang up some impressive junior records during the mid-1930s. A few of the active group on the west coast were: Tony LeVier, Wayne Merrill, Clyde Schlieper and Don Reece. Long Beach staged an All-Junior Air Show in 1932, probably the first of its type.

Below, Dorothy Hester with Great Lakes in which she set many women's aerobatics records. At right, Evelyn Sharp, mascot and Curtiss Robin in which she barnstormed Midwest.

