Edith Foltz Stearns (1900-56)

By William Villani

When Edith Foltz Stearns died in 1956, the Portland Oregonian remembered her as "probably Oregon's most famous woman flier." That notoriety has faded somewhat over the years, but her remarkable career - air racer, wartime ferry officer and the country's first female airline pilot - still causes her to stand out among the state's aviation notables.

Born Edith Magalis in 1900 and raised in Texas, she had an early career as a singer but became involved in aviation after marrying Milwaukee celery magnate Joseph Foltz Jr. Foltz, a World War I Army aviator, had a small barnstorming operation at Swan Island and it was here that Edith learned to fly. She soloed in 1928 and described the event in a 1946 interview with Leverett Richards, aviation editor for the Oregonian: "I was so relieved at getting down safely I let go the controls and breathed a sigh of relief," she told him. "About that time the ship ground-looped. Well, I never did that again."

Soon earning her civil license, the newly-certified aviatixx set her sights upon loftier goals. Learning that Elinor Smith had set a new endurance record for women, she vowed to best the mark. According to articles in the Oregonian, she intended to make her attempt at Seattle on June 16, 1929. However, the newspaper carried no further information on her effort, so apparently she did not succeed in besting Smith's record. Nonetheless, the episode exemplifies the young flier's ambitious spirit. She would have more luck in the 1929 Women's Air Derby, the 'Powder Puff' race between Santa Monica and Cleveland. Her plane was the brand-new Alexander Bullet, a sharp-looking low-wing monoplane described by Richards as being 'tricky as a Balkan politician.' The race would hold several interesting turns for the Portland pilot.

(This article will be continued in the next issue of the newsletter.)
Oregon Aviation Museum

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The Oregonian (right) surveys the wreckage of his 37th PS P-43 as guards look on. (OHS #213189)

The Broken Lancer

By William Villani

It isn't a very well-known fact, but the 55th Pursuit Group operated Republic P-43 Lancers out of their Portland base both before and in the early days of World War II. One of these, s/n 40-2909, met a dramatic end December 1, 1941 on a Hillsboro farm. This photograph from the Oregon Historical Society's Oregon Journal collection shows the result.

24-year-old 2nd Lt. Arvid Malmstrom of Dividend, Utah had taken off that morning six days before Pearl Harbor on a routine flight. The P-43 he was flying was one of 272 that would eventually be built, the plane essentially being an interim step between the P-35 and the P-47. While doing aerobatics, Malmstrom found himself in an inverted spin from which he was unable to recover. He elected to bail out.

Malmstrom exited the aircraft but had a frightening moment when he reached for his ripcord and discovered that it was not there. He then realized that it was on the other side of his body, found it, and was relieved his canopy blossomed out safely above his head. He drifted down into shrubbery in the Hillsboro area, his Lancer impacting a short distance away in a field owned by farmer Albert Greener.

Malmstrom survived without injury, Sadly, only 13 days later another of the 55th's pilots would not be so lucky. On December 14, 22-year-old 2nd Lt. Karl Leabo, a Portland native and 1937 graduate of Albany High School, hit a log on takeoff at Everett in P-43 s/n 40-2941. Lt. Leabo was the 55th's first casualty of the war. He is buried in Albany's Riverside Cemetery.

REFERENCES
Pomeroy, Earl N. 'Pretty Clouds Poor Seat, Flier Says After Bailing.' Portland Oregonian December 2, 1941 p.5
U.S. Air Force. Aircraft Record Cards for P-43 aircraft s/n 40-2909 an 40-2941.
Woodman, Don. 'Safety Chute Saves Airman.' Oregonian December 2, 1941 p.1.
1995 Annual Meeting

-Featuring Patrick Harris, authority on early Oregon aviation-

The 1995 Annual Meeting of the Museum Corporation will be held from 2-4 PM on Sunday, March 19, 1995 in the Map Room of the Village Green Inn in Cottage Grove. Open to all members and friends of the Museum, this meeting will feature an election to fill positions of four Directors whose terms expire in 1995. All active members of the museum whose dues are current are eligible to vote for Directors and on other business which may come before the annual meeting.

Following the business meeting, Mr. Patrick Harris, Director of the Old Aurora Colony Museum, will present a review of early Oregon aviation history. Mr. Harris, who received an MA degree in American History in 1981, had a portion of his thesis "The Coming of the Birdman: the Aviator's Image in Oregon 1905-1915" published in the Oregon Historical Quarterly in 1984.

Light refreshments will be served following the program. It will aid in planning for this event if you will indicate your plans to attend on the ballot at the bottom of this page and return it to the Secretary in the enclosed envelope. All members and friends of the Museum are encouraged to show their support by attending this annual function.

IMPORTANT NOTE

If the mailing label of this newsletter is marked with a RED DOT, your dues are more than 12 months in arrears and we can no longer maintain you on our mailing list. Although your membership may have lapsed for a year or more, it is necessary to pay only the appropriate amount for the current year to reinstate your membership. Current membership classes are: Annual Contributor, $100; Annual Sustaining, $50; Annual Family Member, $35; Associate (individual), $25. To continue or reinstate your membership, just make your check to the order of the Museum and mail it to the museum corporate secretary in the enclosed envelope.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTION BALLOT

THE BOARD RECOMMENDS ELECTION
OF THE SLATE AS IT APPEARS ON THE
BALLOT.

Four Year Term - Vote for FOUR:

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Please circle: I DO NOT intend to attend the annual meeting.

Detach and return in the envelope provided
Oregon Air Fair
A Flirt for OAM

By Roger Starr
The Oregon Aviation Museum made its first appearance at the Oregon Air Fair held November 12 and 13 at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland. In her welcoming letter, Oregon governor Barbara Roberts termed the Air Fair “the Northwest's premier aviation celebration.” And judging from the attendance, estimated to be as high as 30,000, she may very well be correct.

Even though this is the fourth annual Air Fair, it was the first time that the Museum has participated. Our display centered upon two very unique artifacts. The skeletal remains of a 1927 Boeing Model 40-C mail plane that crashed near Canyonville on October 28, 1928 and the accompanying informational display proved to be a favorite of those attracted to our area. The story of this incident appeared in the November 1994 OAM newsletter.

Helping attract visitors was the other artifact, a working rotating airway beacon light. The beacon was mounted on a wooden tower cleverly crafted by Director Elwood Hedberg. As part of the beacon display, we had a 1950 aeronautical chart enlarged in order to help visitors better understand the airway beacon light system used by such aircraft as the Boeing mail plane.

The Oregon Air Fair provides an ideal opportunity for the museum to carry out its purpose of displaying Oregon aviation history. The Northwest Aviation Association, organizers of the Air Fair, have invited the Museum to be an exhibitor at the 1995 event. Your ideas for next year's display are most welcome. We need to take advantage of the opportunity to build our membership and educate those in attendance.

The following members helped set up, man and dismantle the displays: Art Armstrong, Royce Beatty, Ray Costello, Walt Dunden, Al Grell, Dee Grell, Wil Heath, Elwood Hedberg, Jan Hedberg, Roger Starr, Peter Stack, and Larry Well. Thanks to their efforts, our first visit to the Air Fair was declared a success by your Board of Directors.

Oregon Aviation Museum
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