



# EAA Chapter 21 NEWSLETTER

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## A Story of Stearmans and Funks

*Last week, after breakfast at the Merry-Go-Round, I sat down with Floyd Moreland as he regaled me with stories of some of the adventures of his past. Floyd was at times employed by Glenn Stearman, and Joe and Howard Funk, and for them he built airplanes.*

*Pete Wiggin*

A little bit earlier I was talking to you about the Jensen brothers of Coffeyville, Kansas. They were manufacturers of oilfield jacks.

They had excess money, and they were trying to get into aircraft manufacturing. In 1939 they had gone out to Wichita Kansas to interview a guy that had developed the Beech-Roby prop. This was a manually controlled prop for really light airplanes. They had gone out there to meet this guy at a small airport at Wichita. They had talked to him and had become aware of a guy in the next hangar over that was running a very sprightly looking little low-wing airplane.

This guy turned out to be Glenn Stearman, who had built the light Stearman airplane. Actually, this specific airplane was a 65 hp engine, low wing, and would run about 110 miles per hour at cruise. A pretty sprightly little airplane. The Jensen brothers began talking to Glenn Stearman, and discovered he had left Stearman, [his cousin Lloyd's company] and was looking for a place to manufacture his airplane. He also had a contract with Cessna to build the seats for the Cessna Bobcat—the T-50 twin engine trainer. The Jensen brothers agreed to finance him if he would move to Coffeyville Kansas, which he proceeded to do. So this became the “Stearman-Jensen Manufacturing Company.”

By now it is 1940, and I'm a senior in high school. All of a sudden jobs are available, and I have entered a trade school. After the first three months in trade school I figured out that, hey, these

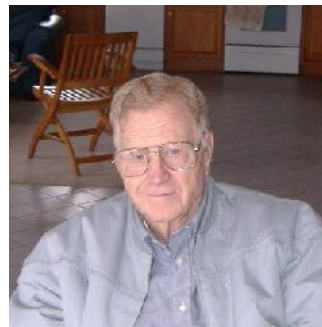
machines are easy to run. I proceeded to go out to Stearman-Jensen, and asked for an application for a job. So I got the application, and got hired!

I was not aware that at that time the Jensen brothers had already figured out the Stearman Ariel had to be certified before it could be manufactured. They had had second thoughts about this, and were separating themselves from Glenn Stearman. They had gone to Ohio, and interviewed the Funk brothers, and had decided to bring the Funk brothers to Coffeyville Kansas, to manufacture the Funk airplane, because it was certified and in production. So, in a sense, that was the first time that I worked for “Funk Aircraft Company.” Even though it was for a matter of a couple of weeks.

Then as things went by, I worked for Stearman (Ariel) for quite a long time. I worked through the certification of the Stearman Ariel airplane. (An “Ariel” is a “Sprite of the Air.”) Eventually they moved to Enid, Oklahoma. I entered the Navy, and when I got out of the Navy I worked for them again. You know, at the end of World War II, companies were obligated to rehire returning veterans.

At that time, I had become a tool maker. I came back to work for Stearman and discovered they were starting to redo an old beer factory into a production factory to manufacture sidewalk bicycles. Unfortunately, every manufacturer, and a whole bunch of other people, got into the manufacture of sidewalk bicycles right at the end of World

*(Continued on page 2)*



Floyd Moreland



War II. These were little V-belt drive things with 12-inch diameter wheels, most of them using surplus aircraft tubing. Glenn Stearman was acquainted with the manufacturers in Dow [Chemical] of magnesium, so he contracted with Dow to have magnesium cast bicycle frames. This really worked very well.

I worked for about 3 or 4 months after I got out of the Navy for Stearman, and I could see within a short period of time, this was going to be no job for me. This was manufacturing toys, and I was still fascinated by airplanes.

So I moved back to Coffeyville Kansas, and went to work for the Funk Aircraft Company. I began as a tool maker. It turned out that I was also a machinist. There were two or three of us that were machinists that worked for Funk. There were surprisingly few machined parts in a Funk airplane. The aluminum bell crank that carried the cables to turn the ailerons were really about the only machined part on the airplane. I got to manufacture those. In a matter of about three days, I think that I made enough bell cranks to last out the full production schedule of the Funk airplane. There were other small manufacturing things, such as threading the ends of the wing struts, and reaming the bushings in the wing struts, and so on.

I started working for the Funk brothers in about April of 1946. At that time it was understood that you came to work, and you got a fixed \$30.00 per week. Everybody got a \$30.00 per week paycheck. Everybody in the plant. Thirty dollars a week in 1946 was a slightly above average wage. Then the agreement was that they anticipated that you would build ten airplanes a week. That was the planned production. Then, in the event that the workforce could turn out eleven airplanes a week, we got a small bonus on that eleventh airplane. Then the twelfth airplane was a slightly larger bonus. By mid-September of that year, we had learned how to do things well enough that we were putting out 20 airplanes a week. My weekly wage had gone up to \$65.00, which was, boy, this was premium wage. The 20 airplane a week thing was really devastating to the economy of the Funk aircraft company, because there was a limit to how many they could sell.

On the airplane, the tailwheel was attached to the rudder. This made it a very positive steer. The airplane was basically a very sound airplane. Very stable. Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas; lots of flat land, and lots of wind. The reputation of the Funk airplane, for a crosswind airplane, became well noticed. Most of those airplanes were initially sold in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Texas, and they made quite a reputation for that ability.

The production of the airplane continued at that rate into November of that year, and then management called us all in to main assembly hangar, and explained that it was winter coming on, that airplane sales were certainly going to decline, and they could simply no longer sell that many airplanes. As a matter of fact they had new airplanes stored in hangars all over the country; wherever they could find hangars to put them in. So as a result, there was going to be two-week furlough without pay in the last two weeks of November, across the Thanksgiving holiday.

Then after this meeting was over, the shop superintendent came to me and another guy, and told us they needed us to stay on and

work. They needed to modify the fuselage jig for the new hydraulic brakes. This required lowering the floorboards, making a lowered area to permit a better positioning of the pilot with the new hydraulic brakes. Those new hydraulic brakes were really, really nice.

They were well designed, cast aluminum, and really OK. So the other guy and I started our work, and we went back to the fuselage jig the following Monday morning in order to start in on this modification.

There was a fuselage already welded up in the jig. We discussed this, and we decided it would be lots easier to properly position this stuff if we've got this fuselage in the jig. The first thing we ran into was a piece of tubing that was in the way. It had to be removed: it wasn't in the new system. The new tubing that we were going to adjust for went down, under that, so I thoughtfully looked at it, and proceeded to take a hack saw and cut that tube out of the fuselage that was welded up in the jig.

I did a really, really neat job. I put a little patch on it, welded it up, and never thought a thing about it. I had been working in a shop that was doing welding at that time, for a couple of years. And I was a very accomplished welder. Although I was not legally certified as an aircraft welder.

We finished modification of the jig, buttoned it up, made sure everything was right, and came back to work two weeks later on Monday morning. About mid-morning, here was the plant inspector—raging at me—“WHY did you cut that tube out of that fuselage?” I explained to him that I had to do that in order to modify it,

and then shortly after noon he came back to me again and wanted to know if I was a certified welder. I said no, but that is a good weld that I put on there, But I'm not certified. He raged again at me, and finally, just before quitting time, he came back, raging at me again, and said: “I'm going to junk that fuselage.” He said: “That's just one airplane we're not going to get this week. And it's all your fault!” So I think: ‘What can I say?’ And we went back to work.

It is first week in December by now. We went ahead manufacturing airplanes at a slightly reduced rate through December and into January. The first week in February of 1947, they called us all back into the main assembly hangar, and explained regretfully that it was absolutely necessary that they cease production of airplanes. They said “We don't want to mislead you. We will not resume production. You should not consider this a layoff where you will come back to work. There will be eight people—the department heads—that will remain, and finish assembling the component parts that were already manufactured.” There were lots of wings and tail surfaces, fuselages and so forth that were in the process of manufacture that needed final assembly. We learned later that that assembly procedure proceeded through a year after that.

Moving forward now, to 1965: I was looking for an airplane to fly. I ran across an ad for a Funk, for \$1250.00, out of somewhere down in southern Arkansas. I got in touch with a guy, and he flew the plane to Pittsburg Kansas, and I met him there. It was a sad looking old airplane that had two different shades of yellow paint on it, with red/brown trim. One brake wouldn't work. He finally



*Stearman Ariel*



*Floyd's Funk*

agreed to take \$1200.00 for the airplane, and \$50.00 was to go to the mechanic at Pittsburg to fix the brake. So that's where I acquired this Funk airplane that we have on the field today.

I went back to Pittsburg a week or so later to pick up the airplane, and fly it back to Evansville. I flew the airplane a year or two, and became aware that it had some brown spots on the wing. I stuck my finger in one of those brown spots, and POW, my finger went right through it. So I immediately began laying plans to recover the airplane. I proceeded to do so, then flew the airplane for a few more years.

A guy named Dale Beach, in California, had acquired a Funk, and had written a book titled: **It's a Funk!**, and listed all of the Funk airplanes, or most of them—there were a very few they couldn't trace. Most of them had a picture and original owners listed. I looked, and by golly, here is my Funk airplane listed. This Funk airplane I had bought, on the serial panel on the placard on the panel, showed a serial number of 398. The manufacturing date was February, 1948.



I have said the plant closed in February 1947. So here is this airplane, manufactured a year later. This airplane, for sure, was one of the last three manufactured. Probably, and this is just simply logical reasoning, it was the last one manufactured. And for this reason: The plant inspector, Ralph Goodman, had junked that fuselage. All of a sudden I'm aware, looking through this compilation of data, manufacturing dates, and so forth, that my airplane, serial number 398, which was the number stamped on the fuselage, fell in with airplanes manufactured at the end of November/first of December of 1946.

I wondered a long time about this. I got to thinking about that tubing that I had cut out. So I came out to the airport here, pulled out the seat, and discovered that THIS is the fuselage that was junked in 1946. I remember thinking, I wonder where Ralph Goodman is today? I'm sure he has met his maker by now. I have the airplane with the fuselage that had been in that jig when I modified it in 1946. Interesting.

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## Young Eagles Rally April 4...

Hello Everyone!

Steve Blankenburger just called me tonight - He's going to need some help flying 40 kids with the local Boy Scout Troops out at Hepler Field on April 4th.

I've got the paperwork ready to send off to the Young Eagle's H.Q. but I'd really like to have a few pilots there if possible! If I had 4 airplanes there with 4 seats, we could get them done in less than 4 flights each! Otherwise, Steve and I will be busy with ours!

If you're interested in flying or helping, please send me a note! We need all the help we can get!

Also, keep your calendars open for this Summer's Rally. Not sure when we're going to do it just yet, now that there's no airshow scheduled this year! If anyone has any ideas, I'm all ears!

Fly safe,

John Rudolph [jrudolph@rudolphweb.com](mailto:jrudolph@rudolphweb.com)

EAA 21 - Young Eagle's Chair



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## ...and maybe another in August

*Here's a note from Greg McMichael:*

I have been talking with Mr. Ken Miles of the Collings Foundation about their "Wings of Freedom 2009 Tour" which has a B-17, B-24 and P-51 giving rides and ground tours. [http://collingsfoundation.org/cf\\_schedule-wof.htm](http://collingsfoundation.org/cf_schedule-wof.htm)

THE COLLINGS FOUNDATION



I have been persistent and I feel they may bring their tour to EVV. I assured Ken that we would be very gracious host's and would like to schedule a YE event to coincide with their visit. He welcomed the idea. (I promised free tours on our LST for his flight and ground crew. Enterprise car rental will provide complimentary cars for them.)

My 85 year old Father is a 30 mission veteran as a tail gunner in a B-24 in Europe during WWII. I would like to give him a ride in the B-24. There are very few B-24's still flying.

Anyway, if they do put us in their schedule, it would be sometime in August. I will keep you posted.

Greg McMichael

# EAA Chapter 21

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Address Service Requested



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## Upcoming Chapter 21 Events

**EAA21 Chapter Meeting: Wednesday March 11, 7:00 PM, Skylane Airport**  
Check the website: [www.eaa21.org](http://www.eaa21.org) for program information

