

A BRIEF HISTORY OF OUR FRATERNITY

Part 2 – The Founders

By: James McCarthy

In a letter written in the 1990s by one of our early Fraternity members the concept of the **Silver Wings Fraternity** took place during a conversation between five men on a flight from California to Pennsylvania in an early Lockheed Constellation. Their idea was to recognize the twenty-fifth anniversary, “Silver Anniversary”, of a pilot’s first solo in a powered aircraft. Thus, the name of our Fraternity was coined high over the Western part of our country during the summer of 1958.

In Part 1 of this history series of our Fraternity we began with some background and history about **Russell J Brinkley**. “Russ” is deservedly referred to as our “Founder”, however the Fraternity was begun as the result of the combined efforts of Russ and four other prominent aviators of the day who formed the nucleus of the organization; **Edwin Lyons, John Hickey, Walter Harvey Jr, and Harry Davis**. In this installment I will cover some of the career highlights and accomplishments of the first two of these co-founders.

Ed Lyons

When a GA pilot hears the name **Ed Lyons** it is instinctive to first think “Zahn’s Airport” in Long Island and certainly he was an integral part of making Zahn’s a major venue for the development of General aviation in New York and in the United States. In fact, there is a rich colorful history of Ed’s flying career prior to Zahn’s.



Born Edwin Leibowitz on Feb 4, 1910 in Brooklyn, New York, he was a fighter pilot, bomber pilot, flight instructor and flight examiner. He flew for the “Republicans” during the Spanish Civil War up till 1939.

As part of his duties he flew both bombing and strafing missions in the Polikarpov R-Z “Natasha” ground attack aircraft which the Spanish were fond of calling the “Rasante”. He then transitioned to some transport aircraft and finally the Tupolev SB-2 high speed bomber.



He then established the Palestine Flying Service in 1938 in what was then know as Mandatory Palestine (Now Israel) which was a precursor to the Israeli Air Force. It is reported that later he flew with the Chinese Air Force, but the details of this episode are unclear.

After WWII Ed returned to New York and started a flying school located at Zahn’s airfield on Long Island. He began teaching with a Canadian Fleet trainer and a small Piper. Later Ed (seen on the left in the picture) with associates, **Jack Looney** and **Walter Hoffman**, founded the Amityville Flying School (AFS). AFS was created to train veterans to fly using their G.I. Bill benefits. In 1950 AFS bought the airfield from **Joe Zahn** (on the right in the picture) and continued to improve and expand the facilities. It soon became the busiest general aviation airfield in the state of New York and at one point in America. It was

home to the corporate aircraft of the New York Yankees and New York Daily News as well and 200 resident private aircraft.

On retirement as a CAP Colonel and after Zahn's closed, he and wife **Pearl Hickey** returned to Brooklyn, but lived later in West Hempstead, LI. Ed died on May 18th, 1991. Many stories can be found describing some very lively flight lessons with Ed and how he gave the examinations for many private pilots.

John E Hickey

The most senior co-founder of our Fraternity was John Hickey. John was born In Springfield, Illinois on January 26, 1890. His first flight was in 1908 in a hot-air balloon. He made his first solo flight on October 18th, 1910 in a Wright type biplane owned by his instructor **Art Smith**. He barnstormed at fairs and other exhibitions until 1915 when he joined the Army in the Aviation Section and reportedly flew mail planes during WWI.

John was invited to join an elite organization, the "**Early Birds of Aviation**" which was started in 1928. To be admitted you must have piloted a glider, balloon or airplane solo prior to Dec 17th, 1916. Only 598 pioneering aviators were accepted for membership.



After the war he found his way to Oregon where he flew mail from Portland to Alaska between 1920 and 1922. On one flight he got lost over the Pacific Ocean where he states, "Ice forced the plane down, and I rode it out,". In 1968 he was recognized by the US Mail Service with a service award on the 50th Anniversary of the US Air Mail Service.

He moved back to the Midwest where he started Triangle Airlines, providing air service out of St. Louis to locations in the surrounding states.

John was honored by the Illinois Air National Guard Group based at Springfield in 1969. He was inducted as an honorary member of the newly formed unit as a tribute to his lifelong contributions to Aviation.

He lived most of his life in Springfield, but later he moved to Ashland, ILL and after his death in 1970 was buried in Yatesville Cemetery just outside of Ashland.

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Look for the history of the remaining two co-founders of the Fraternity, **Walter Harvey** and **Harry Davis** in the next issue of the *Slipstream*.

Additional Sources for Part II:

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- Jacksonville Daily Journal, May 19, 1968, "Ashland Notes", pp. 13

