NEW YORK TIMES ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION,
PART IV
(1-219)

Microfilming Corporation of America
Sanford, North Carolina
1979

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No. 116

Charles S. Jones

Aviation

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October, 1979

Louis M. Starr
Director

The Reminiscences of

CHARLES S. JONES

Oral History Research Office
Columbia University
1960

PREFACE

This manuscript is the result of a tape-recorded interview conducted by Mr. Kenneth Leish of the Oral History Resaerch Office with Mr. Charles S. Jones in New York in May 1960.

Only minor corrections and emendations have been made, and the reader should bear in mind, therefore, that he is reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word.

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Charles S. Jones - May 1960 - by Kenneth Leish.

Q: You joined the Curtiss Flying Service in 1915, is that correct?

Mr. Jones: No, that's not correct. I went with Curtiss right after World War I, January 19, 1919. That was with the old Curtiss Airplane and Motor Co., at Garden City, Long Island. I was in World War I, and when I came back, through mutual friends I met Mr. G.H. Curtiss, at that time president of the Curtiss Company. I was still in the Army but the Army ran the Air Force in those days. I went to see him about a job. He told me that the Curtiss Company was planning to build some commercial airplanes, particularly flying boats, and that if I'd wait till spring he would give me a job. But he advised me to stay in the Army, which I did, and I was assigned to Mitchell Field.

Early in January I had a call from Mr. Curtiss, and he said that he had sold the company to John N. Willys, and that he had commitments with several people like myself. He referred me to Jack Davies, who was working for Mr. Willys, and Mr. Davies wondered how quick I could get out of the Army because he wanted to start immediately. So I was able to get out in a week and went to work for the

Willys company the day I got out of the Amry, January, 1919. They had some very grandiose planes about building lots of new aircraft up in Buffalo. They did build several airplanes --one was known as the Curtiss Eagle -- which I believe was one of the first transport airplanes built in this country. As I remember it, it's the only airplane I ever heard of that was built with one, two and three engines -- it had one Liberty, it had three ~~OX~~ K-6 engines, ~~it was~~ about 150-160- horsepower, each, and then it was built with two K-12 engines, 2 four hundred horsepower. Also they built a flying boat and they built a commercial plane, the Oriole.

Like most things in those days, it took a lot longer to get these things under way than they'd figured on. In the meantime, Mr. Davies had hired a lot of pilots, many of whom had worked for Curtiss before, like ~~Dick~~ Vic Vernon, Doc Allen -- quite a group of us. We used to meet up at 52 Vanderbilt Ave -- that's where the offices were. Went up there every morning, tried to find something to do -- then we'd go to the ball game.

After this had gone on for a month or two, I suggested that we had a lot of airplanes around, a lot of old Jennies, and maybe we'd better put them to work. That was when we revised the old Curtiss Exhibition Company, which was

started by Mr. Curtiss in 1909 up at Hammondsport for instruction and demonstration work. They had a charter and we revised that, and we started in doing flight instruction and carrying passengers, things of that kind. We used what is now Roosevelt Field Racetrack -- that was our airport when we first started. We also had afield at Buffalo and one down at Newport News. We started off with some more war surplus Jennies. Incidentally, Curtiss made a deal with the Army to buy all the surplus Jennies, and we bought those and soldthem all around the country to barnstormers, and we used some of those in the air service until later these airplanes I was mentioning, some of the new ones, came along, like the Oriole. We continued that sort of operation from that time up until about 1930, when bad times came along, and that's when we went out of the flying business.

Yes, in the beginning it was flight training and demonstration. We also did exhibition work. I made contracts with a number of fairs to go and do stunts and take passengers. We also did a big business carrying newsphotos -- this was before pictures by wire, and I don't think there was a single news event in the country of any importance, that we didn't fly the pictures.

Q: I have the impression that was something you took up a little bit later. Around '21, when business became bad and the fair and passenger business had died down -- had it? -- you said this photography was your bread and butter at that point?

Jones: Well, we got paid better. All the time we did all of these things, and the fair business got less but we always did good passenger business and we also did a lot of aerial photography, which was just starting. I think maybe I specialized in news events because they were more interesting, and frequently we had 10 to 20 airplanes on one job.

Q: Did you do photography yourself?

Jones: No, I used to do the flying, and I believe that Mr. Sherman Fairchild who developed the Fairchild Camera made his first flight with me. I used to fly him very frequently when he was experimenting with his early cameras. He developed this between the lens shutter. They were the first good cameras for taking vertical pictures, and we started in. He did alot of surveying jobs from the air. We also took oblique pictures, but mostly it was mapping.

We in the exhibition company, which later became the

flying service, we didn't handle that. We worked with Fairchild and people of that kind. We just did the flying, and they did the photography.

Q: Flying pictures for the newspapers around the country was a big business, wasn't it?

Jones: Yes, that was a big business, for those days. Don't forget, there were no airlines at that time. We had the airmail, yes, which was run by the Postoffice Department, but there were no airlines as we have them today, and the only way you could get these things was to contract with somebody like ourselves to do that sort of work.

Q: One of the biggest aviation contracts in those days was probably the 15½ thousand dollars that you had for delivering pictures of the Dempsey fight.

Jones: That's right, the Shelby fight. That was in Shelby, Montana. That would make almost a book in itself, to tell the whole story. We did the job for a concern in Cleveland called NEA, Newspaper Enterprise Association.

And we contracted to deliver the pictures from Shelby to the West Coast, to California, and all through the East. We had quite an elaborate set-up. One fellow, Nick Naimer, was going to fly to Spokane, and Portland. A young fellow named ~~Cannunder~~ Ken Unger, who was an airmail pilot -- I made a special deal with him to fly one of our airplanes from Shelby down to hook up with the airmail down in Utah, and then we had a couple of airplanes that were flying East, one flown by Ed Ballou, ~~he picked up special~~ equipped with extra gasoline and he was supposed to make an all night flight, and all the way along we had additional airplanes. I think we had something like 16 or 18 airplanes along. Of course, Shelby was a long ~~mmmmmm~~ ways away and there was no service -- we just used an old field out there that we picked out. By and large we did a good job, but this fellow Ballou had trouble getting his motor started, and as a result he was very late getting ~~in~~ started. I was in Minneapolis, about midway, and we had pilots stationed all round to make these trips. Ballou never did get through. We had another fellow, Ed Ronnye, who got through, the pictures east.

I can remember so well, I got our relief pilot started out in Minneapolis, and right after the airplane had left, I happened to look under the front seat and there was the film that we'd contracted, to go to Pathe News. We'd forgotten to move that. So the pilot had forgotten to take it!

Well, I was quite concerned, so I said, "I'll take it myself." I got out another airplane that I'd borrowed, and I just took off, just got to the end of the field and the motor quit dead. I had to land in the next field and then it was too late to do anything, so I finally went down to the station and arranged with the porter on the train to take the film. I had a plane waiting in Chicago, ready to pick it up in the morning. Don't forget, this was before the days of night flying -- we had no lights, nothing of that kind -- and so, though several of the pilots did fly at night, it was pretty hazardous business.

I had to call Mr. Cohn in N.Y. -- I'd done lots and lots of work for him, and I don't think I ever hated to do anything worse in my life than to call him. Of course, he was pretty irked, but actually we got the film into New York way ahead of everybody else. That was sort of typical of the way things went.

Q: There was a great deal of interest in the Woodrow Wilson funeral --

Jones; Yes, I remember that quite well. We didn't work for just one company. Most of the time, we worked for half a dozen companies, and we were supposed to

send some airplanes down to Washington to bring back pictures of the Wilson funeral. It was in the winter, and it was terrible weather. We had three Orioles, and they all started out, and none of them got more than ten miles away from Roosevelt Field before the motors all quit. We couldn't figure what was wrong until we brought the airplanes in, and we discovered there was an icing condition. This was the first time we ever encountered ice. It just happened to be the right conditions.

So all those airplanes came down. None of them were cracked up, and we had to haul them back, but we finally made it. I think that was the trip where I was again working for Mr. Cohn of Pathe. He was one of the most enthusiastic users of aircraft. He was a little short fellow, and I can remember he was very insistent -- he was a terrific competitor -- and I had a very fast airplane, and I used to land in the park over at Jersey City. Then he could get over there very quick. I can still see him coming out to the field in this long coat, way down to his ankles, derby hat pulled down over his ears, and a handful of film in each hand. I think we made the trip in something like an hour and ten minutes. We had a terrific wind. I think it was a record. He was much more pleased over that than he was with the Shelby deal.

Q: The ~~funeral~~ Coolidge inauguration was interefered with because of the snow.

Jones: Yes -- you remember, he took the oath of office at Plymouth, Vt., and there was snow at Plymouth and none down here. So we actually equipped a couple of planes with skis, which we'd used up in the Canadian Rockies, and we sent wheels to Albany. Albanay was about 50-50, and we flew some airplanes in there; landed on skis at Plymouth; landed really in the mud at Albany, then came down here on wheels.

Q: You had quite an experience yourself flying down to Floyd Collins, when he was trapped in the cave -- could you tell me about that?

Jones: Probably one of the worst days and nights I ever had. Of course, you have to put yourself back to the time when Collins was in the cave. Oh, for several weeks every day they expected to get him out, and of course the whole country was all excited about it. I had sent a lot of airplanes out, all the airplanes I had, and finally it looked like they were going to get him out, and somebody talked me into going. We picked up this same airplane, by the way, that Ballou had had -- that was to be used in Shelby with the extra gas. I got off the field before daybreak that morning, and got the

airplane to start, and there was no compass in it. Typical of the way things ran in those days. So the mechanics hastily put a compass in, and I took off, before daylight, and there was an overcast. So I went through that, and started on my compass, and flew for about an hour and a half, on the compass. Then the clouds started to break and I came down -- of course, by this time I should have been over the mountains, instead of which it was perfectly flat.

There was snow on the ground. Instead of heading west, I had headed ~~north~~ South, and pretty soon by flying north I picked up the Delaware River just below Philadelphia. In other words, the compass was about better than 90 degrees off. So I flew back to New Brunswick, where the airmail field was, and I got them to check my compass and fix it. Then I started again, and it was a terrible day. We didn't used to fly on instruments, we used to go under the stuff, and I was just dodging mountains and all that. I had this extra gas. I'd flown six or eight hours trying to get across the mountains and couldn't. I finally came to following this road -- having no idea where I was -- and I saw a sign on the road: ~~Brownsville~~ Moundsville, 14 miles. Then the road disappeared in fog.

So I finally decided I'd had enough for the day, and I picked a field and landed. The field was all right, except that

somebody had tethered a calf out in the field and there was a little crowbar that they'd tied the rope to, and that crowbar just caught a bit of my landing gear, and then took a hole out of the side of the fusillage about the shape of a football and three times as large.

Well, I phoned the people I was working for, and found that Floyd was still in the cave. So I went in town and got hold of a blacksmith, and we got some plywood and a couple of pieces of metal and went out and patched the hole. In the morning, I went out. Of course, we had no starters in those days. We used to have to crank the airplane. I'll never forget, it was a cold morning, and luckily out in the field there was a fellow who was then driving a truck, but who'd been in the Air Corps in the War, a mechanic; he was able to swing the propeller. It was very cold. And finally there was a fellow who was butchering hogs so we went over and got some hot water from him and we finally got the thing going. This was a water-cooled engine and by putting hot water in, it heated it enough that we could start it. Before that, it was with the ordinary water, we just couldn't get it going at all.

I remember a very funny thing that happened. As I was sitting there in this field, right down in the mountains, I looked up and there was a flying boat going over, biggest I'd ever seen in my life -- and that was

the first roaming amphibian, which was being delivered to the Air Force.

I went on to Moundsville and in the meantime they got Floyd out, so we had an airplane fly the pictures in to Moundsville and I flew them back to New York, again landing in Jersey City, and we got a beat on everybody on that. But I'd been up all the night before and most of that night and two days' flying...it was really plenty.

When I was coming back -- When I was lost in the first place, as I say, there was an overcast. It was mmmm clear above me but when I got back to the Delaware River, I was right down on the river, and I knew where this field was, if I could follow the Delaware up. But I'd forgotten about this bridge, and suddenly it loomed up ahead of me. The only thing I could do was go under it, instead of over it. But then, that wasn't so unusual in those days.

Q: You had really a nationwide network, didn't you?

Jones: Yes, we had a hook-up with all these various pilots around the country, so if we had a big job to do, we could do it. We had all kinds of very interesting experiences. For instance, when the Shenandoah blew up, I flew out there, I flew two fellows

out there, one photographer and one newspaper fellow. It got dark before we got out there, and we finally had to land at Pittsburgh. I don't know whether you know Pittsburgh, but there's not too many places. I picked out this place where there was no lights and landed, and we got out and went downtown. In the morning, when we went out to get the airplane, we found that we'd stopped about 20 feet from -- this field was short and right below us, about 20 or 30 feet, was one of the main thoroughfares, going into Pittsburgh. If we'd gone another 30 feet that's where we'd have been. Experiences of that kind were not uncommon at all.

Q: Did you have trouble in the beginning convincing people to use airplanes?

Jones: Not particularly. Of course, I can think of a couple of other stories. I remember when the arsenal blew up over in New Jersey. I was there all day long. That was just about like World War I. These buildings were blowing up and of course everybody wanted to get the best picture, so we had a lot of sport that day.

Then of course I think one of the funniest things that ever happened was on the round the world flight, the four Army planes that went around. They had some pictures

which they sent into Boston, and we were supposed to fly the pictures back to New York I had this little Oriole of mine, which was very fast for an airplane in those days, and the Army also had a pursuit plane up there. But the people I was with pulled a fast one -- they arranged with a launch out in the harbor to bring in the pictures, and they brought the pictures right into the airport, and we got a good start on these people. As a result, we got our pictures into New York well before anybody else. But in order to be sure of getting delivery, these people insisted that we drop the plates -- these were plates, they weren't film -- drop the plates by parachute in a special arrangement they'd made in New York harbor, and they'd have a boat to pick them up.

So we got our pictures into New York, then we jumped into this slow airplane and flew out there and this photographer dropped the plates, but the parachute didn't work and they all broke. After flying them all the way from Boston! The only thing that saved them was, they happened to have one film that wasn't broken, but their good pictures were all gone.

Q: Did you do any developing on the planes, with darkrooms?

Jones: Yes, we did, later, a number of times we did that. We did that between Washington to New York, and on the way to

the West Coast or Middlewest, I've forgotten just what they were, but we did that at times. Of course, in the early days the planes weren't big enough.

Q: I know that you did a lot of peculiar things, variety in early aviation. For instance, the incident of the egg crate?

Jones: Yes. This fellow had this egg crate that was supposed to be such that if you dropped it, it wouldn't break the eggs. So he hired us to drop it out of an airplane. I think it was at 2000 feet. We weren't sure that it was going to work. It not only broke the eggs but it broke the crate. There was nothing left of it. He was pretty disappointed.

Q: How much did you charge for something like that?

Jones; Oh, probably $25, $50, something like that. We used to get paid by the hour, and on these other things we were paid on the contract. You bid for them. With passengers, we used to get 5, 10, 15 bucks. Across country flights. We used to make a lot of those.

I flew Will Rogers all over the country. Of course, when Will Rogers was killed with Wylie Post, it was a tremendous loss, not only to aviation, but he was one of our great big boosters. Of course, he was a great American. I've always

felt that he could say more in a few words than any man I ever knew. "If all the cars in America were placed end to end, it would be Sunday afternoon," and things of that nature. I've had many, many experiences with Will.

Of course, one of the original stories that's been repeated many times actually happened when I was flying Will Rogers down to Washington with Frank Hawks. Frank was going to take Will on a Navy plane for a flight around the country for the Red Cross. So Frank asked me if I would take them to Washington. Frank and I were in the frontseat, Will was in the back. This was one of those planes with the throw-over wheel, so that you could fly it from either side. We also had sort of a trick gas business in it, gas arrangement. Frank was flying and all of a sudden the motor quit -- due, of course, to the gas arrangement. It wasn't serious, but Frank just threw the wheel over and said, "You fly it a while."

Will never did get over that. That story's been told a good many times. I suppose it happened to other people.

I can remember also that the next morning, when Will and Frank were taking off in this Navy ship, they put a parachute on Will. It was the first time he'd ever had one on. He had this big heavy flying suit on, and they buckled this parachute on him, and Will was blustering about it -- he didn't like things

like that very good -- and they said, "Now, of course, if Captain Hawks says you have to jump, you jump over the side. You take this ring here, you count three, then you pull the ring."

Will said, "What do they have it way over here for? That's an awkward position."

Well, "Doctors have discovered that fellows in emergency normally reach for the heart, and that's where the ring is."

Will said, "If I have to reach for mine, I'll grab myself by the neck and choke myself to death."

Q: Did you use your plane to make windstorms for movie-making?

Jones: Well, yes. We had airplanes, just the fusillages, and we used to create windstorms. We had a lot to do with the movies. I remember we did the flying for "The Green Goddess," with George Arliss, and the Gish girls -- we made a couple of movies with them. I made a movie in the Canadian Rockies and I was up there for six weeks, with Lionel Barrymore and Louis Wolheim. We actually shipped the airplanes up in an express car from New York. We flew off from a lake. The picture was "Snowblind." We flew off the lake, we flew with both

skis and wheels. Lionel -- incidentally, the reason I went on this flight was that I'd already flown Lionel on a number of flights around the East, and when he heard he was going on location up there, he insisted that I go as the pilot. He loved to fly. We flew all over the country, making this picture. The heroine of the picture was Zena Horne Owens -- she's not so wellknow, but she's a good actress --and she came out a few days later. I remember when she got off the train there she said her mother had had a premonition, just before she left, that she was going to get killed in an airplane. That was a good way to get her started, and she was just scared to death. Of course, the script called for her to do a certain amount of flying. We talked to her and she was just scared to death, so finally -- incidentally, this airplane was a standard with a 3-6 engine, had controls on both seats, because part of the time I flew in the front seat, part in the back seat. We used to take the stick out, but the mechanism was still in the floor and the rudder was still there. I was afraid she'd get excited, so the first time, we just taxied up and down the lake, which was very nice -- it was a goodsized lake.

So we got her in the back seat, and we tied her in so she couldn't move, and I went up and down the lake three or four times, and she began to enjoy it. So without saying anything I finally took off. First, she looked down and she

saw?
thought she was about 30 feet up, and she didn't know whether to be mad or cry or what to do. Of course, I set it right down. After that, she just loved to fly. Had no trouble. But we sure had plenty of trouble when we started.

Q: Did you have a camera rigged on this plane?

Jones: Oh yes. We had a lot of trouble with that. With the first camera, it was so cold that the oil congealed and the camera wouldn't work properly. So we had it fixed so I could run the camera from the stick -- just press a button. We had to build some gears for a little light French camera we had, and we took all our pictures with that. I had a very good mechanic with me, fellow named Jerry van Wagner, and he was really a genius. He and this cameraman worked a number of days, because if we couldn't use the camera in the air, the whole usefulness of the trip was gone. But they got it fixed up. Matter of fact, it took so long to take the picture that the ice went off of the lake. There was no airport, but there was a little three hole golf course, and for the last week or two that we were there, we used the golf course. That was a little tricky.

Q: Any other movie experiences that might be interesting?

Jones: Well, I can't think of anything specific.

Q: There was a story about a bridegroom --

Jones: Oh yes, that's right. The bride went on ahead, I remember. The groom was kidnapped, and the bride went on ahead, and we had to catch up with the bride. I've forgotten the details. We flew the groom up behind to meet his bride. She'd already gone. The best man and the ushers ran off with the groom.

Q: Was this a publicity stunt?

Jones: No, I don't think so. I think it was a practical joke, but -- of course, we did a lot of that kind of thing. This fellow is still a well-known comedian; Charlie Farrell, I hear him when I'm in Florida. He was in vaudeville. He had an appointment, and he missed his train and I flew him up there, and he's never forgotten it. Every time when I go into his nightclub down in Miami, he immediately tells this story. You ran into a lot of that, in those days.

We used to work one day for the Revenue people, the next day for the bootleggers. This was during Prohibition, and laying right outside the three mile limit were all these

boats with liquor. As I say, it was immaterial to us who we worked for. We used to go out to these boats and drop messages, where to come in and all that sort of thing. One of our pilots was flying an amphibian, and he had a forced landing and was picked up by one of the bootleggers. They hitched his amphibian on behind the bootlegger's boat by a rope, and one of the crew sat there all night with an axe, all ready to cut this amphibian loose, in case the Revenue boys came out. As it happened they didn't come out, so in the morning the pilot got back in and they got the engine fixed up.

I also remember very wellone day when he came in and got us all over to the hangar, andout of the airplane he pulled about ten cases of liquor. The Revenue officers got after a bootlegger and the bootlegger got scared, so he started dumping the cases. So he simply landed and put the cases aboard, and we were pretty well fixed for several months.

Oh no, we never carried any liquor. We didn't break the law. We weren't taking any chances. What we were doing was perfectly legitimate. Sometimes the Revenue people would hire us, sometimes the others.

Q. What other kinds of things did the flying service do?

Jones: Well, instruction. All the time we ran schools.

And as I told you, aerial photography and passenger carrying. Those were our main jobs. I've always felt that this particular period in aviation -- very little has ever been written about it, it's a sort of forgotten period -- and yet, it opened up the way. It fills an important gap. After World War I, the military was shot, the airmail was run by the Postoffice Department, and there was just no other aviation, except this. Of course, I quote the flying service because I was connected with it, but all over the country there were hundreds of fellows doing similar work -- barnstorming, instructing, ~~constructing~~, carrying passengers -- and all. And I've always felt that that was a great contribution to aviation, under most difficult conditions.

We had no ~~Air Force.~~ airports. Don't forget, there wasn't a single commercial airport in the United States.

I can remember a fellow contracting with me to go up to Waterbury, Conn. for some concern up there, and they insisted that I land on their property. Every once in a while I go back and look at it and shudder: there was just enough room for the wings, there was a river alongside one side of it and bushes, and I went in there and got out, I don't know how. Just made one landing, that was all. Then I moved over to

another strip, where we were carrying passengers and so forth. But the places that we used to get in and out of were just fantastic. You wouldn't believe it.

Q: What do you recall about passenger carrying?

Jones: Well, I remember one day... Of course, these airplanes weren't very fast. I mentioned before that the C-6 standard... I can remember one day carrying passengers all day out at Roosevelt Field, and I would take off andhead the airplane into the wind, which was blowing very strong; I'd drift back over the field and come in and land. In other words, I'd take a passenger up to 1500 feet, I'd drift back over the field and I'd come in without ever making a turn. They'd get quite a kick out of that, you know. Just something we did...

Q: Did the passengers ever get violently airsick?

Jones: No. I don't think so. I had a couple of guys try to commit suicide. We had one fellow who did it -- actually, he did it. This was much later. This was in 1927-28. We had a fellow rent a plane out, and he walked out on the wing and jumped off. We had a couple of instances besides that where we

talked the fellow into not doing it, or he got scared. But I know of at least three times when that happened.

Q: What about carrying peculiar things like ~~man~~ animals?

Jones: I don't think we did so much of that. Our airplanes weren't big enough, actually. Of course, now they ship cows and everything else, but not so much then. Of course, in the same article you mention, there's the item about my flying Gene Tunney to the fight when he trimmed Dempsey in Philadelphia. ~~Dempsey~~ Tunney had his training ~~camp~~ camp up at the Delaware Watergap, at the country club, and a fellow named Wade Morton, who was a race driver, dropped into my office one day and said Tunney had approached him -- he thought he'd like to fly down to Philadelphia for the fight, from his camp. He wanted me to go up and talk to him. So Morton and I went up to his camp, and met Tunney on the stairs of the country club, and he said, yes, he wanted to fly down. I've always gotten a laugh out of this, because apparently there'd been some rumor that Tunney was going to fly. I think his manager's name was Gibson, and while Morton and Tunney and I were in making arrangements for the flight, Gibson was telling the press that there was no chance in the world of Tunney's flying to Philadelphia.

So the day of the fight, or the day before the fight, I flew up and landed at Buckwood Inn. That's -- Fred Waring owns it now, there's a very nice golf course there, and I had used it many times when I used to fly making motion pictures, so I knew the country and decided to take off from the golf course there.

The day of the fight, it was a terrible day. The mail wasn't flying, and when the mail wasn't flying, it was -- it wasn't good. So I went out and played some golf. I kept on the telephone and still the mail wasn't flying. Along about 11:30 or 12 o'clock, along came these people onto the golf course, Tunney and Martin and the whole bunch. We had it fixed, incidentally, so Martin was going to drive into Philadelphia in case we couldn't fly.

Tunney says,"Are you ready to go?" and I said, "Well, Gene, the weather's impossible. The mail isn't flying."

"Are you going to go?"

"Well, I got to go," I said, "because I'm flying the pictures back tonight, but that's no reason you should go."

"If you're going, I'm going,"he said.

So I thought: well, I'll go up and I'll circle the field, and if it's too bad, I'll come back and I'll land him, and I'll make him go by car.

So I went up, and I stuck my nose down on the Watergap,

and it didn't look too bad. I made a couple of turns, and I was through the gap, but it was so close that then I didn't dare go back. Up to this moment I hadn't thought much about it: the Delaware River goes right down to Philadelphia, but it goes along ways, it winds around. I wasn't sure how much gas I had. I looked down, and here was everybody going to Philadelphia in cars, and it suddenly occurred to me -- if the motor should quit or something should go bad, I couldn't get over fifty feet. I was up in the clouds, hills on both sides, and if I should mmm land in the river I... and if I should so much as sprain a thumb on Mr. Tunney, I might as well leave the country.

From then on, I didn't like it. I was afraid I'd miss the two rivers at Bethlehem. Finally I went through the last bunch of hills, down in Jersey, and then I knew where I was, and I cut across and landed in Philadelphia. Frankly, I never was so glad to get a man on the ground in my life. A lot of people claimed that Tunney was sick and disturbed. Well, that was not so. I was the only one that was really disturbed. He was calm, and Morton -- well, he didn't know any different. But Billy Gibson was pretty sore. Of course there was a lot of talk about, would it have any psychological effect on Dempsey?

Tunney did that later. One of our planes flew him from his training camp to another fight down there in New York.

Q: Do you remember other instances of bad weather flying? or close calls?

Jones: Well, I think that flight to Floyd Collins was the worst I ever had, cause that was bad weather all day.

Q: Did you have any crackups?

Jones: Oh yes, I had several crackups. Mostly I tipped over. You'd land in a soft field... I'll never forget one time landing back with the photographer at Roosevelt Field, and we happened to strike a soft spot, and we went right over on our backs. Of course, we had belts on, it didn't hurt anything. But he quite suddenly opened his belt, and he fell down and darn near fractured his neck, just dropping on his head from five or six feet up. He just didn't think.

I hit a tree one time, coming in in New Jersey, spun in and luckily hit another tree. I had 13 stitches on my face. But otherwise I've been pretty lucky.

Q: Did you do any racing?

Jones: Well, I started racing in 1921, 1920-21, and I competed in all the air races from then to 1929 -- the National

Air Races -- in Detroit and St. Louis, Dayton, Spokane, Philadelphia, Mitchell Field -- I suppose 40 or 50 races in that time, in addition to local meets.

I mentioned the Chipped Wing Oriole ~~Memorial~~ -- I also flew that in the Ford Tour about 1926. That originally was an ~~memorial~~ oriole airplane. Every year we'd cut a little bit off the wing. Then we put wing radiators on. This was the first airplane that ever had wing radiators, and I remember I flew not this particular airplane but the first set of wing radiators that were ever built, I flew on an airplane to Kansas City to compete, and it was awful hot. I had a mechanic with me, and we were flying along, to a place called Atooma in Missouri. All of a sudden, I looked out, and here this wing radiator was blowing up just like a balloon, like you'd blow up a tire, you know. And all of a sudden, up she went. My mechanic was in the front seat, and I pointed to this thing. He looked out when it burst, and I thought he was going to jump overboard, but of course we just landed. We had some other radiators with us which we put on.

This particular ~~Tripp Memorial~~ Chipped Wing Oriole -- we called it ~~trip~~ chipped wing because we kept taking pieces off the wing -- actually, in Philadelphia, that airplane, →

which probably originally never went over 120 miles an hour, we were getting 170, which was pretty fast in those days.

Q: This is one of the real contributions of the races -- the fact that people made design changes, to go faster, and improved aviation.

Jones: I think that's true. Of course, Curtiss -- I used to test some of his. I never flew in the Snyder Cup, although I used to fly the airplanes, because mostly they were military products, built for these races. For instance, the first time anyone ever went faster than 200 miles an hour was at the national air races at Detroit, which was 1922-23, I think; within two or three years all our fighters were going that fast. In other words, racing in those days made a real contribution, because many of the things which made faster airplanes possible.. for instance, this Oriole, when he got through I don't think I had much of a safety factor, but it was a better flying airplane than it ever had been, and you could cruise along 150, 160 miles an hour instead of 100. Now, that was a real contribution, particularly for the military. So all those things did help.

Q: Are there any stories about the races?

Jones: Of course, one of the worst ones, that always hurt me

more than anything else was at Dayton. This was a close course race, about 250 miles, and you had to carry a certain amount of load. So we had some ballast, which consisted of some bags of lead shot that we tied down in the front seat, because this was the specification --you had to have so much of a load in this particular race. I was way ahead. I must have had a lap on everybody. And as I did the turn before the last pylon, to come into the field, all of a sudden the motor quit. Of course, when you race, you're only 20, 25, 30 feet above the ground. Luckily there were two fields -- I can still see them: there was a field, then there was a fence, then there was another field. So I put the wheels down in the first field, still going awfully fast. I got to the second, pulled back, had just enough to get over the fence and land in the field. I did chip the landing gear, took a piece out, but nothing very serious. So I rushed around to see what was wrong and found I was out of gas, and the reason I was out of gas was that there was a valve down under the seat, and it was very rough on this trip, and these shot bags got to jumping around and they just opened my gas cock; and for the last I don't know how long, it was raining gas out of my tank.

I thought: well, gee, if I can only get some gas, I can still win this race. $2500 was the first prize. So there was a fellow sitting in a Ford, right up beside the road,

watching the race, and he said, "What's the matter with you? You were way ahead."

I said, "I know it, but I'm out of gas."

He said, "I'll get you some." He had a Model T Ford. So he got an old can and got down under the Ford -- seemed like it took him a week to drain the tank. I think he'd been picking berries. He had a big pail, with no bale on it, and he started down the field with this pail of gas, when all of a sudden he caught his foot in the raspberry bushes, and down he went, gas and all. By that time it was just too late. But I'll never forget that fellow dropping the gas.

Q: Was the first flying circus the Curtiss Flying Circus?

Jones: No, the Curtiss Exhibition Company. That was the name of the original Mr. Curtiss' company at Hammondsport. It was chartered; he had a charter. So we revised that in 1919, when we started this business. That was called Curtiss Exhibition Co., and that we kept till 1923-24, and then we changed the name to the Curtiss Flying Circus, but it was originally the Curtiss Exhibition Company.

Q: When did the Curtiss-Wright Flying Service come into it?

Jones: Well, you see, that was when Curtiss and Wright merged.

You see, all the original flying was done under Curtiss. Curtiss and Wright were competitors. Curtiss built airplanes and engines. Wright Co. at that time built nothing but engines. Then there was a merger in 1927-28, along there.

Q: You were president of the flying company?

Jones: Yes. I reorganized the exhibition company, and I was connected with it all during its operation, though for four or five years I spent more time doing other things. I spent a lot of time selling the military. We built the first metal propeller, built by a fellow named Reid, and I flew the first metal propeller ever flown. It was all right, except that you didn't know what was going to happen. I remember I sat there with one hand on the switch, and the other on the stick, and just hoped it would go, because this was very crude. Mr. Reid used to come out with these metal pieces , pieces of metal, that he used to bend himself. He used to put them in a vise and bend them, and then he used to straighten them down with a file. It wasn't a very good job.

Q: Did you ever have any trouble with it?

Jones: Oh well, we never had any break -- but they weren't very efficient at first, because he didn't have

adequate airfoils. But it did prove -- now, of course, we have nothing but metal propellers but this was the first one. I had charge of the sale of metal propellers, so until we revised the Curtiss-Wright Flying Service, that was during the boom when everybody was just going to town -- we had a five million dollar company then, and that's when we started. We had forty flying bases throughout the United States. In 1929 we did two million dollars worth of construction, in the Curtiss-Wright Flying Service. We were the sales agency for Curtiss Commercial Airplanes. Then of course when the crash came along in 1929, the first thing that ~~got~~ a guy gave up was his airplane, and the business just went to pot.

So the Curtiss Company, in order to save themselves, decided they would just discontinue any flying activity. Many of these companies went right on and are going today. Take Grand Central Airport -- that was one of our airports. CC Mosley was our manager. He did wonderfully well with that. At that time, I tried to get the military to use our bases for instruction and for reserve flying. We were adequately set up. We had good hangars, good equipment. But the military just couldn't see it. And yet, when the war came along, a few years later, all the primary instruction was done by

civilians, and is to this day. If they could have seen it our way, we never would have folded up the flying service.

I was vice-president of the Curtiss Wright Corporation at that time. For a while we continued to run North Beach, now La Guardia. We built this airport by the way, where it is. And the airport at Valley Stream. I went back and did that, and I also handled the public relations for the corporation. But when they finally decided to go out of the flying business, that was the only end of the business I knew much about, so that's actually when we organized this school. Mr. Warrender ~~Munder~~, who was with me with the flying service -- he was in charge of the service -- and of course Mr. Vaughn -- he was doing similar work for Eastern Aeronautical. That's when we started in the school business.

Q: How would you say the people who learn to fly now differ from those who were interested in aviation and learned to fly way back when?

Jones: I don't think they're as much interested now as they were 20 years ago, actually. In the first place, flying has become a lot different. Today it's nothing but jets. To be sure, there's still a lot ofprivate commercial flying, and there will be; and there's still a lot of

schools just like ours. They're not too different from what they used to be. You go out here to Zonn's Airport --it's quite like the kind of flying service they used to run 20 or 30 years ago. Those people would be much better qualified to answer your question than I am. I just don't know, because of course we haven't done any flying since we've been in this business.

In the old days, you remember, we used to wear goggles, and sit out in the open and wear helmets and that sort of thing --well, you don't have any of that any more. It's closed cabin, but flying's as fascinating as it ever was and far safer. Why, I flew an airplane from Princeton to New York one time, and had seven forced landings! Now, that's about 70 miles. I suppose a fellow learning to fly now would never.... and yet I had that many forced landings that trip. There was more adventure --sure, the airplanes were slower -- I think in many ways we were probably better pilots. We had to be.

Q: Do you think in the old days if you cracked up there wasn't the same chance of getting killed that there is today?

Jones: Well, they go faster now. Prbbably, if you have an accident... but -- ~~(off tape)~~ today it might be more serious.

The Link Trainer -- I think this is an important phase of aviation, and rather historic, and we had a part to play with it. You might get hold of Ed Link, it might be interesting.

In any event, this fellow Link, his family was in the piano and organ business and he used to repair organs. He also became interested in flying. This was along about 1926-27, and he had a good deal of difficulty, so he developed what was known as the Link Trainer. He utilized the principles of the organ -- that is, he utilized a series of vacuum bellows, and then he hooked up a motor and he had this device which was like an airplane cockpit, with a stick and a rudder, and it turned and it banked, and so on. He used it in connection with the flying school.

At that time I was president of the Curtiss-Wright Flying Service, and so he sent a fellow down to try to interest us in this device, and I sent a fellow up to Endicott, N.Y., where he was operating at the time. He had this Link Trainer and some old airplanes he'd bought from the Curtiss Co., known as the Curtiss-Wright Junior, which was a little pusher.

I had a fellow up there for a couple of weeks, and he came back and reported that this device was all right, that it saved some time in learning to fly -- he figured it might save several hours. Because what Link used to do was, he'd

put the student in this trainer, and he'd get the movements and so on. Then he'd get in the airplane and he could solo much quicker.

Also this fellow I sent up reported to me, he that we were doing an awful lot of flying in the Curtiss-Wright Flying Service, and that we were getting paid by the hour, and there wasn't a very great inducement for us to save a fellow some times. He also said, and I agreed with him, that when a fellow's learning to fly, he needs all the time he can get in the air. If he was that close, he ought not to be learning to fly anyway, in other words. So we didn't go into it, though, till after I got to know Link.

A little later he developed some of these same devices that he put in amusement parks, and I helped him finance it, through a friend of mine, and we had ten or twelve of these trainers at Coney Island, Playland, and some in Chicago. So I was a big owner of trainers, and they went very well until they developed this other device that would roll and loop and so forth. This was a stationery thing. We had a target so a boy could see if he was doing well, and it went all right for a few years.

In the meantime, Link tried to sell these to the government, with no luck. He sold one to the Navy, but got nowhere with it. So in 1932, right after we went into the school business, after I'd left Curtiss, he came into the

office one day and said he was discouraged. He'd decided to give up the trainer business. Now, this was just the time when instrument flying was coming in, and radio. Prior to that, we had no instruments, we had no radio. In talking with him, it occurred to me that if you saved a fellow a couple of hours learning to fly, that was one thing, but if you took this device and actually taught instruments, which was teaching the pilot to better himself, and radio, it would be useful. So I suggested to him, why didn't he put some instruments and radio in this thing? And then he would have something which was more marketable.

He said, "Well, I'll try to do it. If I do that, would you sell them?"

That was the arrangement that we made with Link back in '32, '33. I think during the war we sold millions of dollars worth of these trainers, and that was the only contract we ever had. We sold them, and we worked all those years on that sort of thing.

Well, he went back and put in very crude instruments and a very crude radio system. At first, the instructor would say, send the A and N signals himself -- he would plot the course on the map and send the signals himself. Then we developed what we called the crab, an automatic device for tracing the course signal. And so far as I know, that was the first synthetic

training device that was ever built.

Well, it so happened that just about that time, he delivered one of these, and we rented a place over at Radio City. We were one of the first tenants, when Radio City was built. We had a place over there, and a couple of weeks after we got under way, President Roosevelt was elected. You remember, he cancelled the airmail and the Army had to fly it. Well, I knew the Army would have trouble, because I was flying in the reserve and I knew we had no pilots that could fly instruments, and the instruments were no good -- theyweren't properly calibrated in the airplanes -- and we'd made no attempt to do instrument flying.

So I immediately went to Washington and got hold of General Foulois, who was chief of the Air Corps at that time, a friend of mine, and toldhim about this thing. He said, "It sounds good to me, but we don't have any money to buy them."

I said, "I think this is important -- you assign some fellows from Mitchell Field." Incidentally, the flight from here to Cleveland is the toughest in the country, tougher than the Rockies for flying the mail because while the hills aren't so high, there's a lot of them and the weather changes very rapidly.

So he arranged to send a coupld ofpeople from Mitchell

Field over into New York, and we also had one out at Newark. They tried this thing and they liked it. We actually took all the Army pilots who were flying out of the Eastern division and gave them some trainer time.

Of course, this is not necessarily the whole reason, but this was the only division where we had no accidents. We killed thirteen people in that experiment, but none of them were killed in the Eastern division, and I've always felt this use of the Link Trainer had something to do with it. At any rate, that experiment went on for about three months and then it was turned back to the commercial companies.

A few weeks later I had a call from Washington; they asked me to come down, and they said they thought these trainers were a good thing and they'd like to buy some. I remember it very well, because Link and I went down on the train together, and on the way down I said, "How much do you want for these things?"

He said, "Oh, I think I ought to get $1500 apiece for them."

So I got down there and got in a conference with this colonel, and he said the Air Force had decided to order six of these things, and he wanted to know what did Link want for them? So I said, "$3600 apiece," and I thought Link was going to drop through the chair, but I'd been dealing with the Army for a long time, and I knew by the time he got through

the specifications it would be much more. But that was the biggest sale Link ever made, even though later we sold thousands.

We sold these trainers to 58 different countries before the war, including Russia and Germany, and it became a standard training device for instrument and radio flying. Of course, as a development from that we now built these simulators. We have just sold 16 or 18 to them. Where the first trainer cost $3600, these run a little over a million dollars apiece now. We built them for the 707 and the DC-8 and the new Convair, in fact we built them for all. Of course, they are even more valuable than they ever were before, and the reason why an airline can justify this tremendous expense is because of the terrific amount of time they save. They can train crews, they can do check work and test work. This development of the Link Trainer that has gone on all these years is to my mind a very important contribution to the art, and in any history you should cover it.

Q: When did you learn to fly?

Jones: Actually, I first soloed when I went to the old Signal Corps of the Army in August of 1917. I went to ground school at University of Illinois; then I was sent to Dayton where I

took flying instruction, and where I got what they call R. ~~and~~ M. (Reserve Military Aviator) A. I had done some flying prior to that in 1915. A friend of mine in Vermont, George Smith, bought an old Curtiss airplane, and he was flying it, and I had started to take instruction from him. But he was killed, and a very good friend of mine who was taking instruction at the time was very badly crippled, crippled all his life, and Smith waskilled. So actually I gave up flying in 1915, and only went back into it again at the beginning of World War I.

I took my solo work at Dayton and went immediately overseas. I was overseas for -- I got over there about the middle of November, 1917. I was there till the end of the war. I went through ~~Issida~~ Issoudun, which was the pursuit school. When I got through there -- our instructors when I went to the school were all French; it was a French school. The Americans decided to take it over, and they needed instructors, and so I was one of the group that stayed on as an instructor for several months. I went to the gunnery school, and then they fixed up a deal with the French for instructors to go up to the Front, and I went up with several other fellows. I was supposed to go up for a month. They'd send you up and you'd be assigned to a French squadron. I was assigned to Spad 96, that's the Storks. Another fellow and myself were in this squadron. They had a change of administration at Issidon

while I was gone, so instead of staying a month we were up there almost three months. But the Front was moving awfully fast. I had some combat experience, but not enough to talk about. -- And then I was ordered back to Issoudon as officer in charge of flying, and I was there -- It was a very good job. I was assistant officer in charge of flying. We had thirteen fields -- did all the training for pursuit. Then I got a chance to come back to the States. They wanted to get some fellows who'd had experience at the front and had had instruction experience -- we were supposed to go back to the States and organize and train our own squadrons in California, during the winter of 1918, and then go back to the Front in the spring of '19. That was the plan, and I was one of eight instructors chosen to do that. As it happened, the boat that I came back on, the George Washington -- as I went out in the harbor to get on that boat, the guns went off for the end of the war. It was just at noon on the 11th of November. Actually, we were the first ship to get back into New York that had left France after the Armistice was signed.

Shortly after that, I met Mr. Curtiss and wanted to go to work for him, and stayed in the Army -- actually I only stayed in for a couple of months after that.

Q: Do you have any comment on your wartime experience?

Jones: Oh, I don't think that I... There were so many fellows that had so much more experience than I did that I would have no comment on it.

Of course, I did mention that flight from Princeton with seven forced landings. The reason for that -- I had gone down to make some pictures of a Yale-Princeton football game, over the stadium. I had taken one of our airplanes, and we had sold that airplane, and the fellow we sold it to had had his airplane at Princeton. So after we got through taking the pictures, I took his airplane and turned mine over to him. Now, he had a lot of old rotten rubber gasoline lines, and what actually happened -- this was an OX engine -- we'd go along a ways, and then a piece of rubber would come off, and go in a highspeed jet, and we'd lose 4 cylinders, and of course you couldn't fly and we had to land.

That happened seven times. I had a mechanic with me, and it didn't take long to fix it. We'd just ~~threw~~ blow it out and go on. But it took time, of course -- you had to find a field, you had to get in and out, had to fix it up. So it just about got dark. The last one I had was down at the end of Staten Island. So we started over, and there was Brooklyn ahead of us, with the lights coming on, and down below me I noticed this polo field, which at that time I think was Mr. Vanderbilt Polo Field (later Miller Field, Staten Island). So I landed in there, and decided I wouldn't take a chance on

crossing to Brooklyn after dark. I'll never forget, this colored butler came out and said, "Mr. Vanderbilt's compliments, and will you have steak or chicken for dinner?"

That's one of the best forced landings I ever had.

Q: You were trying to push aviation -- to get the public interested in it, and get it publicity?

Jones: Well, I don't know that that was our main purpose. Our main purpose was to keep a bunch of airplanes and people working, and to make them pay, because there was just no paying aviation at that time, and what we were trying to prove was that you could do it. And actually, we did. We did very well over those years. We had some very good pilots, we had a lot of airplanes, we developed a lot of things, bad weather flying, all that sort of thing. So I think we made a contribution, though that was almost secondary. We were just trying to make a living, like everybody else.

I think that just about covers it.

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