
Autobiography of EDGAR W. SEAY, SR.

Birth Date: November 15, 1909 AMA Number: 566722

Submitted ES (8/02)

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Career:

- Sold his first model plane of Charles Lindbergh's Spirit of St. Louis in 1927
- In 1928 went to work at Command Air in Little Rock
- Worked for Chance-Vought Experimental in Dallas from 1948 to 1959
- Attended the National Aircraft show in 1932 and took orders for model planes
- Worked for the Texas-based model airplane company, Gold Aircraft Corporation, for most of 1935
- Worked for Dallas Aviation School as an instructor from December 1935 to June 1943
- Went to work for the Civil Aeronautics Association in 1943
- At the end of January 1945 went to work for Lockheed
- Started M-A-L Hobby Shop in January 1948; M-A-L stands for Model Aircraft Labs
- Made model planes for large aircraft companies
- Served as a State Fair model judge for many year
- Recently began working with law firms to make models of planes involved in air related collisions
- Known for his saw-cut balsa wood kits

The following article ran in the Dallas Morning News on October 29, 2000 and was submitted by Mr. Seay as a biography to the AMA History Program.

Where I come from: Ed Seay Sr.

As told to Bryan Woolley / The Dallas Morning News

Ed Seay Sr. will turn 91 on November 15. He's an encyclopedia of knowledge about aircraft large and small. He and his son, Ed Jr., still run the hobby shop he opened in Irving in 1948, where he still cuts his model airplane kits out of balsa wood.

I sold my first model, the Spirit of St. Louis, in Little Rock in 1927 for the Lindbergh tour. I had bought three kits from the Ideal Airplane Co., an early-day model airplane company in New York. It's now the Ideal Toy Co. I assembled one for myself, I sold one to a fellow and sold the third to Pheiffer's Department Store. It was a three-foot paper-and-stick model.



Also, I sold Pheiffer's a wooden model of the Spirit of St. Louis with an 18-inch wingspan. They had my two models in a window there, on display. Lindbergh had just made his flight and was touring the country with his airplane. Every town he stopped in gave him a parade down Main Street and Little Rock was one of them.

I often wonder what happened to that little wooden model. It would have lasted a lot longer than the paper-and-stick one.

I went to work at Command Air in Little Rock, an aircraft company out by the airport, on August 1, 1928. The Wall Street crash closed them up in 1929, but in a year and a half we put out more than 400 airplanes. I was building wooden ribs for them, and I was making models on the side and selling them to other employees of the company.

We were getting ready for an air show at the Coliseum in Chicago between Christmas 1928 and New Year's. So the foreman of the paint shop came to me and said, "Ed, make us a model to take to the show." I made it a half-inch-to-the-foot model, 16-inch wingspan, of the Command Air. The paint shop foreman was painting the parts of it for me before I assembled it. While he was doing this, the head of the company came through, showing a customer the plant and saw the foreman painting the model. The foreman said, "Oh, we make little ones, too."

The head of the company borrowed that model and hung it up in his office. He never did pay me anything for it. When Wall Street crashed, I got it back. I still have it.

Heading Back Home

In the spring of 1929, 185 people were working at Command Air, and we were putting out two airplanes a day. Fabric-covered wood wings, steel-tube fuselage, places for three people. Sometimes, with the assembly crew working on Sunday, we got out 14 planes that week instead of 12.

When I went to work at Chance-Vought Experimental in Dallas in 1948, it took 17,000 people to put out one F8 Crusader a day. The state of the art had increased that much.

After the crash hit, I went back home to Arkadelphia. My mother and I and my sister were in the nursery and florist business there. I set up a workbench in the attic of the greenhouse office and started building models up there.

Our parts man at Command Air, W.F. Scott Jr. – we called him Scotty – had become the supply division parts man for Curtiss-Wright in East St. Louis, Illinois. He was an old bachelor and set him up bachelor quarters in a basement at the plant, right there on the airport. He was a good friend of Dr. Seuss, and Dr. Seuss painted up his walls and shower stall and everything. It was something to see. I'd love to have pictures of that.

Anyway, whenever Scotty would go out to take orders for airplane parts, he would also take orders for my models. And I paid him his commission in models.

In 1932, I rode my new Indian motorcycle – a \$355 Scout 45 – all the way to Detroit in the snow, sleet and rain to attend the National Aircraft Show. I didn't know what business cards were. I had a little model airplane I had made – 3-inch wingspan – that I carried around in my pocket. I knew the specs on all the civilian and military airplanes made in the United States at that time. And I would get people's attention showing them my little model and pass out order blanks to them instead of business cards.

In 10 days I took 442 orders for model airplanes. It took me to the summer of 1933 to build them all, with my sister helping me paint them. Plus I had the orders coming in from Scotty. I was selling them for \$1.50 to \$15 each.

Anyway, I came to Texas and worked for a model airplane company, Golden Aircraft Corp., from February 1935 to December 1935. Capt. Jack Davis owned the company. He was in business from 1934 to 1937.

Then I went out to Love Field and lived in a dormitory with the other single employees and went to work for Dallas Aviation School. I lived in the dormitory for three years and then got a room with a family, which is where I met my wife, Mildred. She was a Taylor. They were out of East Texas. Over 150 used to show up at their family reunions.

A Good Marriage

I didn't drink or smoke, and Mildred and I had a good marriage. I lost her a little over six years ago. We were just starting our 56th year together.

I taught the first class of Air Corps cadets to hit Love Field. I taught them aerodynamics and the theory of flight and aircraft maintenance. There were 69 in the first class. Five were master's degrees and the rest of them had college degrees. That was the bunch I was trying to teach. There was one West Pointer sent down to be the commandant and drill the boys.

I washed out 13 of those boys because they couldn't get the theory of flight and aerodynamics. That was the statistic they had predicted – that 13 out of the 69 would wash out. And the same 13 I washed out had washed out of everything else, too. So it was a pretty good statistic, wasn't it?

Thing was, Gen. Hap Arnold had come back from the Battle of Britain in late 1939 and called the operators of the 12 major aviation schools in the country to St. Louis and said, "Boys, we've got to start training pilots. We can't wait for Congress to act." He said, "I'll furnish you cadets and give you some old airplanes, and it'll be up to you to house and feed these boys."

Maj. Bill Long, who owned the Dallas Aviation School, made himself a millionaire several times over on eight or 10 military contracts. He had cadets training at Love Field, Terrell, Midland, Big Spring. He had been a pilot in the observation squadron that went to France in World War I and came back and established the Dallas Aviation School in the 1920s.

I found out that the second class of cadets at Love Field was going to be 69 West Pointers, and I didn't want anything to do with those snobs. Lt. Estes, the commandant, was a pretty nice guy to be a West Pointer. Unusual.

The old airplanes that Arnold gave us were PT3s, made by Consolidated, with a Whirlwind J5 in the front of them. And we hired all the instructors we could get. At the end of five or six months, we got P17s to replace the PT3s.

I was an instructor there seven and a half years, from December of 1935 until June of 1943. There never was an accident coming out of my shop, working student labor. The CAA (Civil Aeronautics Administration) came to me and said, "How would you like to work for us?" And I stepped into a government job and moved up to Stillwater, Oklahoma, to keep an eye on the bases there and at Ponca City and Alva. A green 1944 coupe was furnished with the job.

I stayed with the CAA for a year and a half, then they loaned me to the Defense Plant Corp. to store surplus airplanes. I was the government man who received them from the ferry pilots and assigned them over to storage contractors. I put over 800 in Muskogee at Hatbox Field.

The last week of January 1945, I went to work for Lockheed at their modification center at Love Field and was building models on the side. I put out a little balsa wood glider, and I made a little rubber-powered propeller airplane. I made over 60,000 of them before I lost the source of my pre-cut balsa propellers. Now I've found a box of the old props and I'm putting out that old airplane as an antique.

I get \$4.50 for the little glider now. I used to sell it for 25 cents. I haven't put a price on the antique yet. I'm thinking about \$10.

Taking Flight Again

I moved into this hobby shop in January of 1948 and built me an apartment in the back. I called it the M-A-L Hobby Shop. That stands for Model Aircraft Labs.

The following March, I sold my house in Dallas and moved out here. My wife got mad at me for selling the house. But I was in the hole, bankrupt, but I wouldn't take bankruptcy. I moved out here and pulled myself up again. We lived here for a number of years and finally bought the property.

This was an open field out here for four years. I must have taught two or three dozen kids to fly on that field. Then they built the movie theater across the street, and there was a skating rink at the corner where Atlas Plumbing is now.

I worked at Chance-Vought Experimental for 10 years, from 1948 to 1959. I helped build the first F8 Crusaders. I was a mechanic. My wife worked behind the counter here at the shop.

The big aircraft companies would hire me to make a model of each plane they built, and they would give it to the customer when they delivered the plane. And I was a model judge over at the State Fair for a number of years, until my son took over for me.

The last 12 years, I've been with three or four big law firms in Dallas, making models of air-related collisions. They use my models to simulate the accident at the trials. I make \$350 per model. The first case I was on, I had to look at over 400 color slides to determine how the model should be painted.

I've been in business on this spot for 52 years. I built my reputation on my saw-cut balsa wood kits. My best saw that I've ever gotten hold of was a Black & Decker hollow-ground combination blade. After 60 years using my saws, I still have all my fingers.

There's only about four of us left, cutting this extra-light wood for the builders of indoor model airplanes. I cut the wood and make up these kits and sell them for \$10 to \$55. My son and I go to about a dozen model airplane meets, conventions and shows every year, all over the country. I just got back from one in Pensacola. I drove down there in two days, spent two days there, then drove back. No trouble.

It pays to go. In four hours at Pensacola, I did over \$600 in business.

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