



SPORT

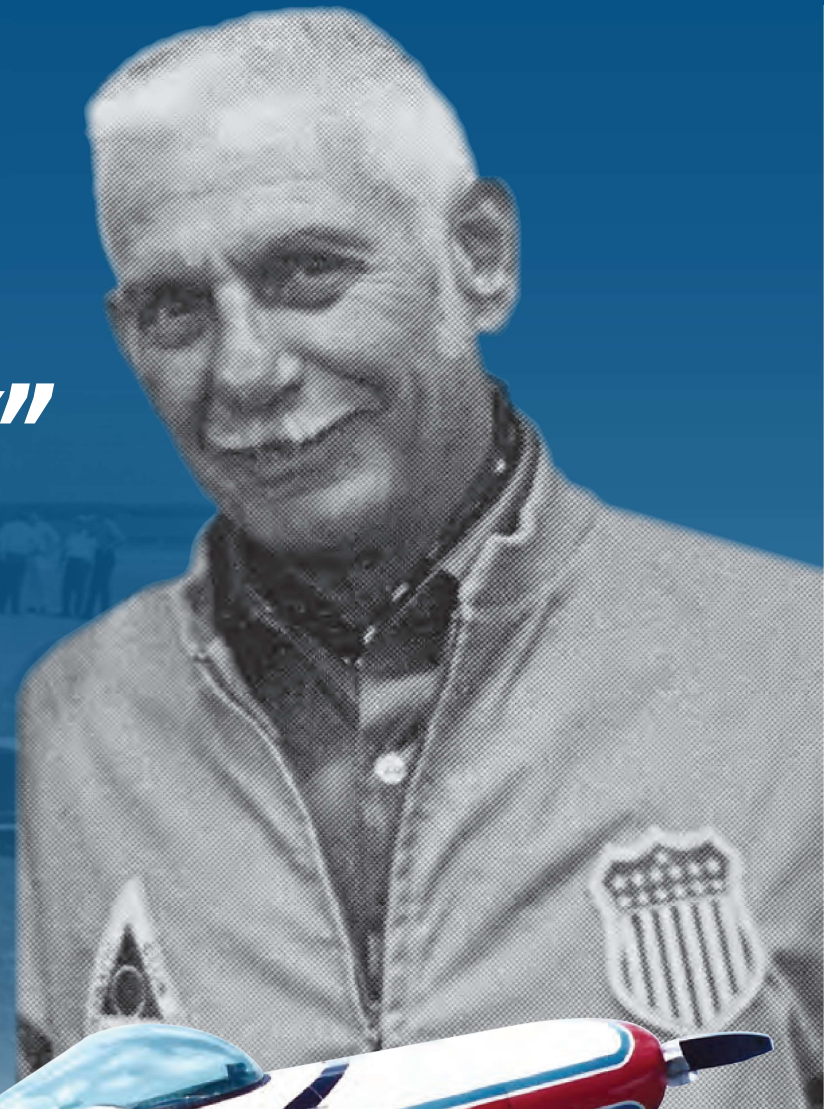
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2022 IAC HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE

MAURICE H. "PAPPY" SPINKS



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“PAPPY”
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BY DAL DONNER, IAC 3787

AVIATION, WHICH HAS HAD such a dramatic and positive influence on our civilization, has been created by unusual and inspired men and women. It, in turn, has inspired greatness in men and women who will sacrifice to fly free from the earth. Their names are a cherished honor roll. Therefore, it is good to honor them. Especially those who gave to our country or helped to advance aviation. "Pappy" Spinks was an aviation pioneer and a man who gave all he could to aviation, especially to aerobatics.

Pappy, who grew up in Fort Worth, Texas, built his own airplane at age 15 and taught himself to fly. Ultimately, he held a fistful of ratings, but never lost his interest in basic flying and building of



Top photo: The Spinks family.
Photo from FortWorthTexas.gov

Middle photo: Pappy in a 1968 newspaper clipping about the U.S. National Aerobatic Championships.

Bottom photo: A 1969 photo of the VIP viewing from original headquarters at Oak Grove Airport.



uncomplicated flying machines. While he owned a Jet Ranger, a twin Aero Commander, and many other classic airplanes, he also owned, at the time of his death, the simplest airplane I've ever seen: the Replogle Gold Bug. This could be constructed from material from your hardware store. The plane was an American single-engine, cantilevered high-wing aircraft with conventional landing gear designed by Merle Replogle.

Pappy's greatest interest in aviation was aerobatics. He saw it as the ultimate flying experience and credited it with design ideas and improvements to enhance safety in all of aviation.

He developed and opened his own airport, Oak Grove Airport, in 1962. There he operated flight schools for both fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. There he also became a significant industrialist by building major components for Bell Helicopter.

Always an entrepreneur, he took on any manufacturing operation that would generate

Top photo: A 1995 U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) aerial view looking northwest at Oak Grove Airport.

Middle photo: A circa 1967-70 photo of Pappy and Charlie Hillard with the finished Spinks Akromaster at Oak Grove Airport.

Bottom photo: A 1969 photo of aircraft arriving for Nationals at Oak Grove Airport.

capital and provide jobs for working people. Pappy enjoyed helping people in love with flying.

I know of a young boy (my son Paul Donner) who got a job at Oak Grove Airport as an “airport kid,” washing airplanes and doing all manner of airport chores. Pappy had a J-3 Cub that had been sitting idle for a few years. He made the young boy a proposition: Help him get the Cub back to airworthiness, help with all maintenance, keep it clean and shiny, buy the gas, and it was his to solo whenever he wished. That young boy is now

a major airline captain and a two-time U.S. National Advanced Aerobatic Champion.

Pappy was concerned and disappointed that something as grand and noble as aerobatics was nothing more than an adjunct to racing at Reno. So, he provided his airport and all the support needed to make it a stand-alone event. The airport hosted the National Aerobatic Championships from 1967 to 1971. More than that, he wanted America to move up from its poor standing in the World Aerobatic Championships. He became president of the Aerobatic Club of America and then authorized to field an American team for world events. Beyond that, he marshaled talent and provided funding for building a purpose-built single-place aerobatic airplane, the Spinks Akromaster.

Up until that time, most American competitors flew utility-type airplanes, modified and improved for aerobatics. But in Europe, the winning airplanes, the Zlin and Yak airplanes, were purpose-built by huge aviation manufacturers.

In 1968, Pappy went to Magdeburg, East Germany, with the American team to see firsthand what was needed and what he could contribute. The Spinks Aircraft Industries building was built in 1968 specifically for the construction of



The Spinks Akromaster is on display at the Texas Air Museum at Stinson Field, San Antonio, Texas. Mr. John Tosh is the museum founder and director, and he was happy to share current photos of the aircraft. The museum boasts a large and varied collection of aircraft, vehicles, uniforms, weapons, and other artifacts that are unique and historical. Visit the museum’s website to learn more about its collection: TexasAirMuseum.org.





the Spinks Akromaster. That same year, his Akromaster, flown by Charlie Hillard, flew in the U.S. Nationals at Oak Grove Airport.

In 1970, Charlie and the Akromaster went to the World Aerobatic Championships at Hullavington, England. While they did not achieve first place, America was on its way! The next World Aerobatic Championships in 1972 was won by Charlie Hillard, the first in the history of world competition for the United States! Pappy Spinks provided the leadership, the funding, the development, and, when needed, a shove to bring credit to his country and to his — and our — favorite sport of aerobatic flying. America had come a long way from 1960, when Frank Price essentially hitch-hiked to Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, without any support of any kind from anyone.

We thank you, Mr. M.H. “Pappy” Spinks, and we place you in our honor roll as the 2022 IAC Hall of Fame inductee! **IAC**

In the early days, Oak Grove had several hangars, with a flight school, aircraft sales, maintenance, stores, and manager all crammed in a single building, but the airport expanded rapidly. By 1966, nicely renovated surplus barracks housed the flight school. A rotorcraft flight school, charter operation, and second helicopter operation soon joined other businesses on the field. Bell Helicopter sent customers' pilots from around the world to Oak Grove for FAA certification and additional ratings.

This 1971 aerial view is looking northwest at Oak Grove Airport, showing several light aircraft in front of a terminal building. The VIP viewing from original headquarters can be seen in the upper right on Page 19.

THE SPINKS AKROMASTER

The Spinks Akromaster was among the first purpose-built aerobatic airplanes in America. Up until its time, the significant aerobatic mounts were modified from various military or utility airplanes. Even the agile Pitts started out as a racing airplane.

Other airplanes, such as Leo Loudenslager's then-Stephens (ultimately the Laser), were in the early development stage, and over years of his noble testing and refinement, it became the inspiration for all the great aerobatic monoplanes to follow the Akromaster.

The approach taken by Pappy Spinks to building the Akromaster was wise and prudent. He wanted it to be capable of performing all of the Aresti family of maneuvers in a dramatic fashion; he wanted it to present well to judges; and while he had a host of his own design ideas, he solicited open-handed input from accomplished aerobatic pilots of the time. Men such as Harold Krier and Charlie Hillard, who would be its premier pilot.

The powerplant was unique — a dry-sump Lycoming of 200 hp. It was motivated by two factors: (1) a cleaner frontal area, and (2) a firewall-mounted oil tank with pendulum, which was then the best answer to an inverted oil system.

Initial flights revealed some CG problems, so the engine was moved forward several inches. This resulted in an improved aesthetic appearance and earned the airplane credit as a lovely, sleek machine.

The Pitts airplane later matured into a four-aileron, higher-powered machine while gaining little weight and adopting an old symmetrical airfoil. Charlie Hillard felt it better suited his style, so the Akromaster sort of got parked.

I had fallen in love with the Akromaster from its beginning. While I did not pretend to become a world champion in it, I knew for certain I could do pleasing and graceful “ballet in the sky,” and that was my joy.

Only a few people had flown the airplane, and Pappy was a little reluctant to trust his treasured machine to me. Marion Cole and I persuaded him that since it had wings and a propeller, I could manage just fine.

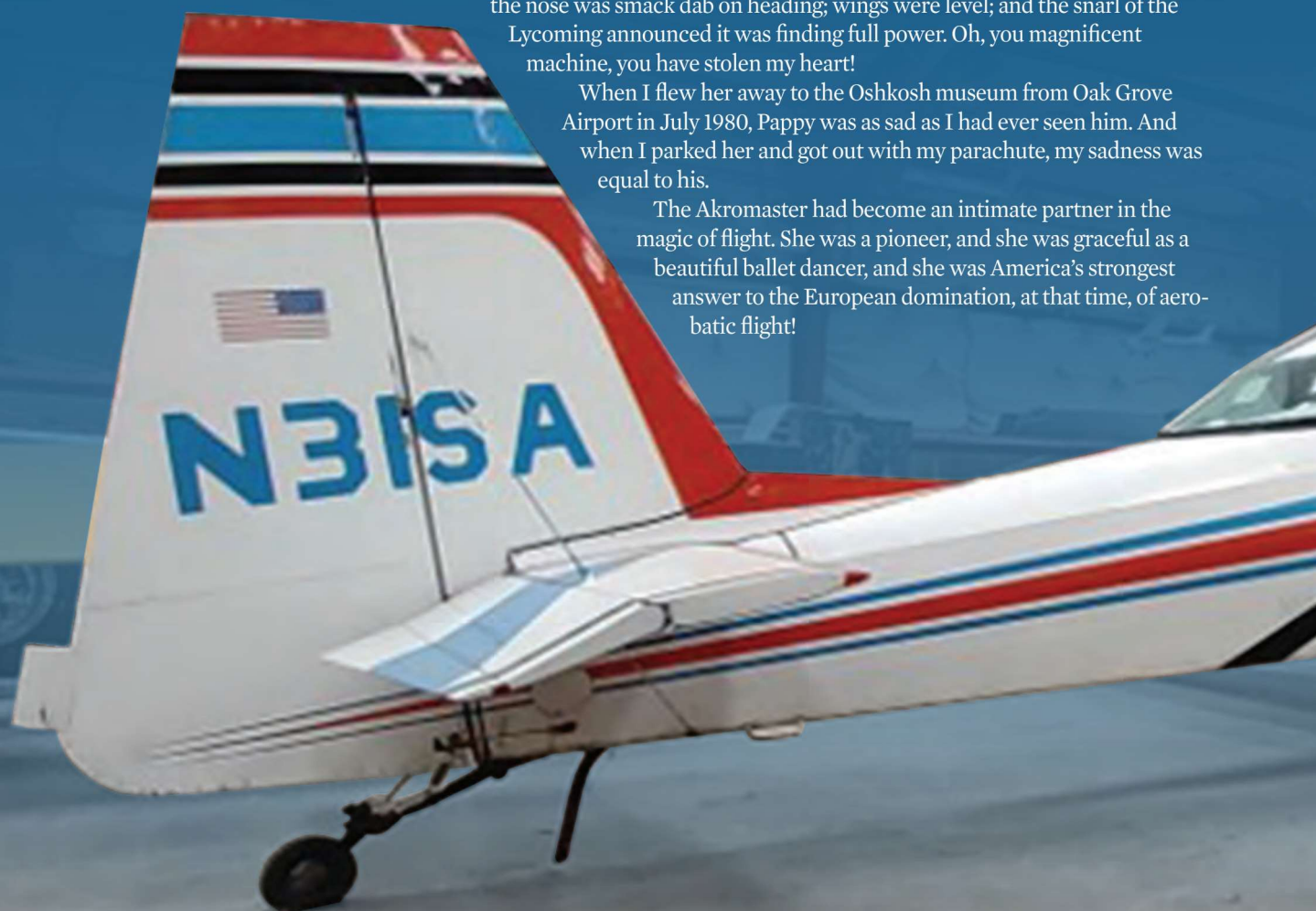
It was a very honest airplane — no treacherous tricks. It was stable in all configurations. It had great cockpit visibility and a then-new idea of plexiglass in the belly. For its time it had a lot of power. It made you learn about power management, which is so essential to good aerobatic flight. It had light and uniform stick pressure (long before spades), and since it was not screaming and mashing you against the belts, it delivered the most joy I've ever received in the uncounted airplanes I've flown.

There was no dual since it was a one-off, single-place airplane. Exploring the more difficult aspects of Aresti became a great adventure.

My first push to outside in it is a cherished memory. Roll inverted; call up all the ponies; swivel head to horizon; and trace a nice half-loop onto the blue sky. Out on top, the nose was smack dab on heading; wings were level; and the snarl of the Lycoming announced it was finding full power. Oh, you magnificent machine, you have stolen my heart!

When I flew her away to the Oshkosh museum from Oak Grove Airport in July 1980, Pappy was as sad as I had ever seen him. And when I parked her and got out with my parachute, my sadness was equal to his.

The Akromaster had become an intimate partner in the magic of flight. She was a pioneer, and she was graceful as a beautiful ballet dancer, and she was America's strongest answer to the European domination, at that time, of aerobatic flight!





Above photo: Note the square sticker with the British flag on the rudder – it's from the 1970 World Aerobatic Championships in Hullavington, England, where Charlie Hillard placed third in the aircraft.

Right top photo: Dal Donner in the cockpit, ready for takeoff. The Akromaster didn't need a lot of runway.

Right middle photo: While in Fond du Lac, the author experienced a fuel problem while practicing over marshland and dead-stick landed in a carrot field without incident. The field's owner and his neighbors helped get the Akromaster to a road, where the fuel problem was solved. The county road offered adequate "runway," though there was a power line crossing it. Their kindness was rewarded by Vern Jobst a couple days later with a ride in the EAA *Spirit of St. Louis*.

Right bottom photo: Dal getting ready to do some aerobatics at Oak Grove Airport, Texas.

