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THE FLYINGEST FAMILY IN CALIFORNIA

"Glenn Martin was always thinking on a national scale," says Vi Smith, author of *From Jennies to Jets: An Aviation History of Orange County*. "Eddie Martin's mind was on Orange County. He wanted to build up aviation in this area." Eddie Martin and his brothers—who, incidentally, were not related to Glenn Martin—established the first fixed air base in the county, known as the Eddie Martin Airport. It was their continued interest in and support of flying that paved the way for John Wayne Airport.

Eddie Martin saw his first plane in 1912, when famous devil-may-care automobile racer Barney Oldfield staged a race between his car and a plane flown by hotshot pilot Lincoln Beachey. (Oldfield won.) Later, when a former Army

aviation instructor bought a plane and started giving flying lessons in 1921, Eddie was one of the first in line. His lessons were cut short when the instructor crashed the plane on a flight to Northern California.

In 1923, Eddie, who was working as an auto mechanic, persuaded his employer to let him enter an automobile race. He took second place, but the real winner to Eddie's way of thinking was the airplane used to fly passengers during the race. He said the Jenny made all the money while the automobiles ate all the dust. Eddie and his brother, Johnny Martin, tracked down the owner and convinced him to trade for an automobile, which they financed through the car agency where Eddie worked.

Because neither of the two could fly, they hired

the former pilot to teach them and to give rides to the public to raise money to pay for the plane. Unfortunately, the pilot was more interested in giving his girlfriend rides than in any income-producing endeavor, so money-conscious Eddie fired him. The Martin brothers were forced to fly their own plane. The next weekend, they took it to a spot on the Irvine Ranch, where they made enough money giving joyrides to convince them to stay in the aviation business.

WARM SYMPATHY AND COLD CASH

Always the straight and narrow, Eddie Martin had something on his conscience. As the aviation business had grown, he had continued to use Irvine Ranch property without permission. That was trespassing.

So Eddie gathered up his courage and went to see the Irvines.

As Eddie walked into the office, he noticed a sign over the door: "Often the way to show warm sympathy is with cold cash." He put aside his interest in the sign when James Irvine Jr. told him the family was aware he had been trespassing. Irvine said not to worry about it and promised to help him get a lease. A short time later, James Irvine Sr. sent for Eddie. They agreed on a five-year lease of 80 acres, which came to be known as Eddie Martin Airport.

At first, Eddie had no problem meeting the payments. However, as the county slipped into the Depression and the annual \$5 increase in the rent loomed bigger and bigger, Eddie fell behind in his payments, eventually ow-

ing more than \$700.

He found a job flying for Western Air Express, then went to the Irvine Co.'s general manager and explained that he still wanted to run the airport even though he was behind in his rent. Now that he had a regular job, would the company take a personal note to cover the amount in arrears? The manager agreed.

After Eddie had made a few payments, James Irvine Sr. sent for him again. Irvine explained that he'd spent some time at the airport and was convinced there was no money in aviation. The young aviator stood stunned as gruff Irvine told him, "You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to cancel your lease." Then he added, "There's something else I'm going to do. I'm going to cancel that note." Irvine insisted on a handshake deal, \$35 a month until Eddie could afford more.

The first thing that flashed through Eddie's mind was that sign. Now he understood what it meant. "Hell, if it hadn't been for Mr. Irvine, there probably wouldn't have been an Eddie Martin Airport all those years," he later said.

TEACHING ORANGE COUNTY TO FLY

Like Glenn Martin, Eddie realized that promoting flying was the surest way to success. In 1924, he launched the Santa Ana Air Club, a group that eventually became the *Eddie Martin Pilots Association*, forerunner of the

*Roll together all the celluloid
images of dashing pilots you've ever
seen, and you've got Paul Mantz.*



After setting a world's record for land planes in 1935, Howard Hughes was forced down in a Santa Ana beet field.

Orange County Pilots Association. He participated in air meets all over Southern California, winning such events as the dead stick landing competition. Many an Orange County pilot learned to fly from Eddie and Johnny, and the brothers kept up a constant barrage of stunts over the nearest crowd to ensure a steady supply of customers. They purchased or built a series of loud, fast aircraft on which Eddie would wing-walk. He would ride a unicycle through town; anything to attract attention. By 1928, the little airport was so well-known that Charles Lindbergh made an unplanned stop there to ask directions to Zenith Aircraft Co. in nearby Midway City.

Both brothers went to

work for commercial airlines in the late 1920s, leaving their brother, Floyd, to run the air school. Several world records were set at the Eddie Martin Airport in this era, including Clarence Young's speed of more than 90 m.p.h. in the *Baby Pursuit* and Jimmy Angel's breathtaking 190 m.p.h. in his commercial plane, *Scout Jr.*

In 1930, Eddie was able to convince the federal government to sell him excess lighting equipment in return for installing and maintaining it. As part of the agreement, the government set up a beacon on the northwest corner of the airport in line with the Los Angeles-San Diego air route. The equipment remained operating until the airfield was abandoned

and the lights were moved to the new Orange County Airport in 1939.

Millionaire pilot Howard Hughes set a new world's speed record in his metal monoplane over a course just north of the Eddie Martin Airport in 1935. His record-breaking flight came to an early end when he crashed in a nearby beet field after forgetting to switch gas tanks.

While the location of the Eddie Martin Airport at the end of South Main Street in Santa Ana near Newport had once been one of its greatest assets, now it became a stumbling block. The Orange County Board of Supervisors owned a 141-acre plot farther east that could become a county airport. They wanted to improve

traffic access to the beaches by extending South Main. A deal was struck giving Floyd and Joe Hager, who had recently bought Eddie out, an exclusive 17-year lease on the new field. It opened as Orange County Airport in 1941.

During World War II, Eddie flew for Lockheed as a production test pilot, while Johnny continued to work for the airlines. At the war's end, both returned to Santa Ana. Johnny drifted back to the airport. He bought out Floyd's partner and organized the Orange County Sheriff's Aero Squadron.

After Floyd was fatally injured in a freak accident in 1955, Johnny continued to run Martin School of Aviation, working there until 1963.