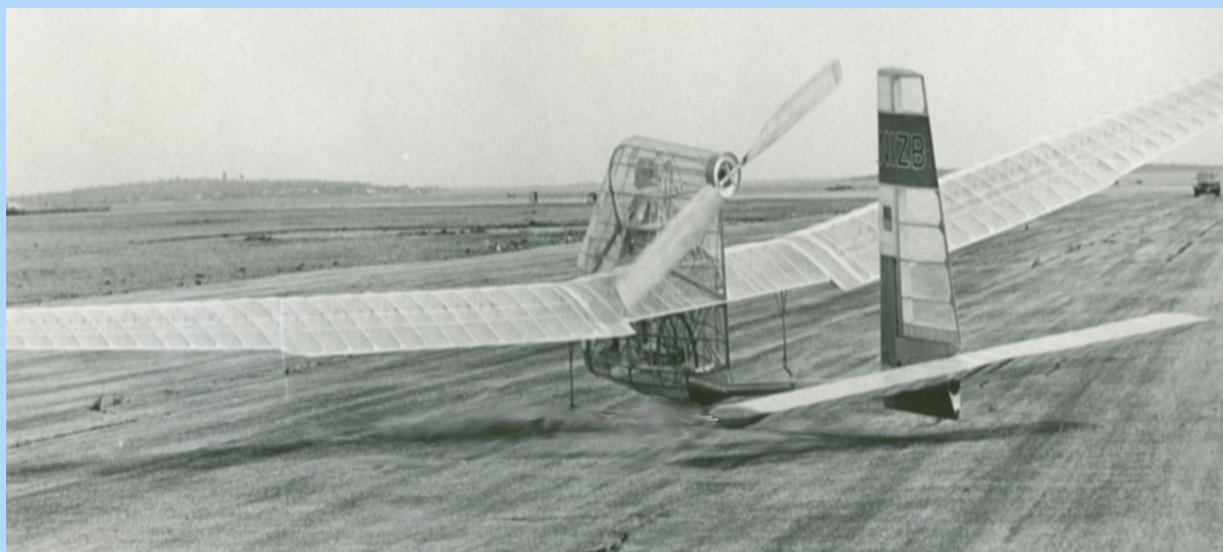


Lt. Col. Joseph A. Zinno USAF (Ret.) (1923 -)
Air Transport Pilot - World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Aviation Pioneer, Artist,
Architectural/Industrial Designer



On an April morning in 1976 at Quonset Point, RI, the Olympian, a beautiful bird with 78 foot Mylar wings rose from the ground and flew eighty feet for five seconds or more. So it was, after 6000 hours of design and construction effort, that Joe Zinno made history by being the first American to fly a Man Powered Aircraft.



The Olympian Flies - 8:16 am 04-21-1976

AP News Photo

Enough notoriety for one man you say, but there is much more to Joe Zinno's life since his birth in Providence RI on November 17, 1923, the youngest of seven children. His oldest brother Clarence who loved airplanes and his pilot brother-in-law Mel ZanFagna stimulated his interest in aviation. "I must have been 6 or 7 years old when Clarence, who had a blue convertible, said 'Come on, let's take a ride. I jumped in beside him and fell back in the seat with marbles spilling out of my pockets all over the golden brown leather. Then off we went into the unknown. I could see nothing but the tops of trees and telephone poles when suddenly a windsock came into view and we stopped beside a small hangar. Clarence came around and opened my door and it was like a curtain parting and right there in front of me in the sunshine, sat a

beautiful orange and black bi-plane. My eyes, big as saucers, followed two men approaching the plane. The one with helmet and goggles belted his trench coat and climbed into the rear cockpit while the other helped to start the engine. Then the biplane taxied out into the distance. I could still hear the engine when it appeared again – this time passing near me. I could see clearly the pilot in the rear cockpit as it crossed my path about fifty feet high.....and the wheels were still turning !!!! I knew then what I wanted to be when I grew up.” And that dream never left Zinno’s mind.



As a child he began to develop an extraordinary talent for drawing airplanes - that skill later turned into Art. He talked about airplanes with neighborhood friends and listened with fascination the conversations his relatives had about the old Buttonwoods airfield and the loops and maneuvers that made up famous aviator stories. “By this time I was really hooked and whenever I got ten cents I would buy a kit and build those small model airplanes. Once in awhile, with my paper route money, I would have enough to buy a three to four foot rubber-powered model.”

It wasn’t long before Zinno would hitch hike to local airports just to touch one of the airplanes. He finally saved the five dollars he needed for an airplane ride at Smithfield Airport and went aloft for the first time in a Fleet bi-plane. During high-school years, Zinno had a chance to do more flying with a man who owned a Taylor-craft with side-by-side seating. “We would drive to the airport in his Lincoln Zephyr and fly for fifteen or twenty minutes.” Anytime an airplane flew overhead, the kids in the neighborhood would say, “There goes Joe.”



Fleet Bi-Plane



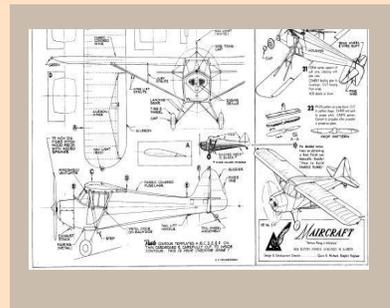
T-Craft with Side By Side Seating



Drawing



Joe and the Russo St. Gang



Model Making

Zinno had set his sights on the Army Air Corps as the best way to get into flying, so after college preparatory graduation from Hope High School, Providence, January 1942, with World War II declared, Zinno took the Aviation Cadet Exam. Passing with ease he was accepted, but to his mother's relief, he had to wait for an open slot.

On April 6, 1943 he reported to Nashville TN as an aviation cadet. Zinno scored high on rigid psychomotor tests, qualifying him to choose pilot training. He was sent to the West Coast Training Command at Santa Ana CA for preflight indoctrination and then to a primary flight school at Cal-Aero Academy in Ontario CA. There he learned to fly and soloed in a Stearman PT 17 bi-plane. After passing all required flight checks he was sent to Pecos TX for basic flight training in BT-13 Vultees ("Vibrators"). At mid-course, he and eleven other cadets volunteered to complete this phase of training in twin-engine Cessna Bobcats (UC-78s – also known as "Bamboo Bombers"). It was strictly understood that a washout here would mean a washout from the cadet program. A buzzing infraction by one cadet was the only washout. He took his advanced flight training in twin-engine B-25s ("Mitchell Bombers") at La Junta CO. After ten months of cadet training he was graduated with Class 44-B on February 8, 1944.



His first assignment after earning his wings and bars was with the 63rd Troop Carrier Group in Sedalia MO for Phase Training in C-47 and DC-3 type aircraft. He trained day

and night in every phase of Combat Tactical Operations that required operating under the most unsophisticated conditions – towing gliders, dropping troopers, formation flying, blackout landings, three-point landings and glider pickup operations. Upon training completion, the class received orders to European assignments, but in spite of Joe's objections he was to remain at Sedalia as a flight instructor for several months. Next he was transferred to the 513th TC Group at Laurenburg-Maxton AFB in North Carolina, flying C-47s and C-46 twin-engine transports. In support of the 82nd Airborne Drop Operations, he towed Waco CG-4A cargo/troop gliders in single and double tows and flew formation with plane loads of fully equipped paratroopers under simulated combat conditions arriving at predetermined times over drop zones at 600 feet. "On our GREEN LIGHT, each stick of 18 would hit the silk and be gone in ten seconds, after which we would return to base and land."

In September 1945 Joe finally received orders for an overseas assignment to the 5th AF to fly C-46s. His specific assignment was Kiangwan AB in Shanghai China. From New York he left for Casablanca, then North Africa to India, "over the Hump" (Himalayas) to Kunming China, and finally arrived at Shanghai on November 9, 1945. "Japan had surrendered so on 5 December sixteen of us were transferred to the Far Eastern Air Force (FEAF) Manila, P.I." Only to encounter another change, Joe was sent to Tokyo Japan for a new assignment. There he was told to pick a crew and a C-57 and go TDY to Korea for ninety days in support of the 24th Corps (Air Sector) Carrier Group in Seoul Korea. He shuttled VIPs between Seoul, Okinawa, Manila and Tokyo.

In January 1946 Zinno was told to pick up a USO Show including the Sharon Rogers All-Girl Orchestra from Kwangju and fly the group to Tokyo. "There were only two paved strips in Korea at that time and weather reports for destination only," Zinno remembered. "We took off from Kwangju and headed for Japan. It was an overcast afternoon and we flew above the clouds. Gradually, towering cumulus clouds popped up through the undercast so high that they looked like buildings." He tried to dodge these dangerous clouds that were really vertical tornados with winds in excess of 200 mph. One turn to the right accidentally put the C-47 in direct contact with a thunderhead. "When we hit it we shot up, and then dropped rapidly. Things were flying all over. Some people hit the ceiling. The updrafts were tremendous. We couldn't move the controls."

After bouncing around in the storm, Zinno finally was able to regain control above the clouds at 12,000 feet and had to make a decision. The weather was rapidly closing in on Korea, so he decided to continue flying toward their destination, but at a low altitude. "I was reasonably sure we were over the Sea of Japan so I began a circling decent through 300, 200 and finally 100 feet to gain better forward visibility and avoid obstacles while looking for a place to land." With darkness setting in and fuel dwindling, he went south along the coast and into the Shimonoseki Straits, between the main island of Honshu and the southern island of Kyushu, flying so low that they actually passed underneath some high tension lines. The coast was rocky and the terrain mountainous, any airstrips were bombed out so Zinno realized he had only one option - he would have to ditch the plane.

Earlier he had spotted some fishing boats in the straits and decided to go down near one of them in the hope that they would initiate a rescue. The lives of six crewmen and twenty civilians were in Zinno's hands. "They train you for this possibility, but it is only in theory," Zinno said. "You have to rely on what you think is the best procedure under the circumstances. The radio operator let out the 75' radio antenna with a lead ball on the end of it and when the ball hit the water, I figured we were about 25 feet above the sea. I announced, "Prepare for impact. We ditched with wheels up, and the plane settled on the water as if we were in a boat." The crew had to brace their feet against the instrument panel to hold the control stick back and keep the nose up. When they came to a stop, Joe stepped back into the cabin expecting chaos. What he saw was the whole troupe sitting calmly waiting for orders; they had no idea they had landed on water.



'Peggy'
~
Before
And
After



'Prepare for Impact'

Painting by Joe Zinno - his own rendering of the ditching in the Sea of Japan, January 20, 1946



The Crew



Sharon Rogers USO
Orchestra

The crew opened the side door immediately and inflated two life rafts, in the deployment Zinno fell into the water and everyone laughed. With tension relieved, the orchestra members looked for their lipstick and some got into the rafts. As Zinno hoped, the fishing boat arrived quickly took crew and all others directly aboard just in time to see the C-47 sink beneath the waves. The two rafts had drifted away and the fishing boat searched for an hour before all were reunited and taken to the hospital. Sherry Rogers Wright the orchestra leader says today, "We owe our lives to Joe Zinno and we keep in touch with one another. We still have reunions every two or three years in different places around the country. Whole families are involved — spouses, kids, grandkids."

Two months later on a blustery day in March, Zinno landed at Kimpo Field in Seoul Korea, turned off cross runway to park and as he began to shut down, a B-17 ground looped right in front of him and burst into flames. It had been taking off for Formosa, full of rescue equipment, when it lost power in an engine and hit four or five airplanes parked on the field. Seeing that the crew and passengers were scrambling to safety from the rear door, Zinno shoved the mixer controls forward, fired up the engines and

pulled his own plane to a safe distance before jumping out to survey the scene. Nearest him was a C-46 burning with engines running. A rescue vehicle with towline attached to the tail wheel couldn't move the aircraft from danger and a crowd had gathered.



1946 North Korea Safe
Conduct Leaflet



Zinno and Navigator Ross



Zinno's VIP Transport

Zinno took action. He darted from the crowd, literally flew up the twelve foot ladder, down the companionway and onto the flight deck. In one continuous leap he jumped over the pilot seat, landing on the rudder pedals and depressing them to release the brake. The momentum bounced him back into the pilot seat where he remembered the unusual mixer control configuration and applied that knowledge to shut down the engines. Then he bounced back out of seat, into the companionway, down the ladder to the ground and disappeared into the crowd. This happened in less than a minute and it's doubtful that the ground crew even knew why suddenly they were able to move the aircraft out of danger. One of Zinno's passengers, a Colonel, remarked that such quick action should have merited a Soldiers Medal.

Zinno's assignments were unique from other squadrons in that they involved highly placed brass or top diplomats and required that the flight plan be carefully prepared and documented. One experience found him flying to the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, to pick up members of a United Nations relief group and return them to Seoul. As he arrived in the North Korean airspace and with wheels down began to make his approach to land, he heard a Russian voice say, "Go around." Confused, he immediately called for gear up flaps up and began circling the airfield and the city. Taking advantage of the view, he had his guys committing all they saw to memory. After fifteen minutes, an American voice shouted, "Get down here before they shoot you down." That wasn't all, after he landed and gathered his passengers, including the General who had commanded him to land; he had to abort take-off three times because of a manifold pressure reading. Finally, since all on board were fearful of the Tommy guns pointed at the plane, and regardless of that low pressure, Zinno took off. Upon returning to Seoul, he was subjected to an intensive top secret security briefing. Zinno said "As a reluctant spy, I was almost the first World War III casualty."

He was discharged in October 1946 and served in the USAF Reserve to be recalled for the Korean War in October 1952.



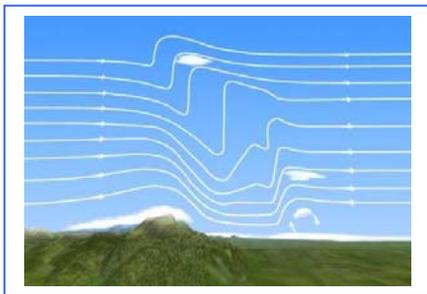
Captain Zinno and his Transport Aircraft

Zinno was sent to Hamilton Field CA to the 112th Radar Calibration Squadron and assigned to Electronic Counter Maneuvers (ECM's), flying B-25s up and down the West coast to test the efficiency of the radar control sites. The idea was to approach close to a site under their radar then climb to 6-8,000 feet and drop strips of aluminum as chaff, jam radio frequencies, and try to fly over their site undetected. In early 1953 Zinno was assigned to McChord AFB to the 567th Operations Group, continuing with ECM flying as the only qualified B-25 pilot on base to test the radar sites of the North American Air Defense Command. From April to November 1953, he took intense C-46 transition training at Ft. Lawson, Columbus GA and was reassigned to the 350th Troop Carrier Squadron at Fukuoka, in North Kyushu Island Japan, just as the Korean War ended.

Next, Zinno drew an assignment to Eielson Field (26 miles South of Fairbanks, Alaska) as Chief Safety Officer to the 5010th Air Base Wing – their province was Anchorage, Elmendorf and upper US. A typical incident involved Two SA-16 flying boats that landed in three feet of Snow with the landing gear still frozen into position. “Both pilots had landed without incident so I was spared the duty of reporting two aircraft accidents. We just thawed out each frozen gear and removed snow from under the wheels. The gears were lowered and the SA-16s returned to their home base.



He flew C-47s to obtain flying time and stay current. Zinno considers those twelve to eighteen months of bush piloting to have been routine. But he learned a lot about arctic flying - characterized by honing survival skills and enduring ice, fog, and mountain wave events.



One such event occurred on a mission to recover some fighters in Anchorage. As he was holding in a racetrack pattern for clearance to land, Zinno saw the telltale lenticular clouds in air clear as a bell, and was caught in extreme mountain wave turbulence with winds up to 40 knots - the C-47 blowing like a leaf in the wind. He touched down on one wheel, banking the plane to stay on the runway. During this arctic stint, Zinno received a commendation from his commander for “human kindness.” He was already in the air when Ops asked if he would return to Anchorage for a mission to take a civilian mother to see her critically ill son in Fairbanks. He immediately agreed, returned to base and patiently waited for some time while she got ready to go.

In April 1954 Zinno went to McChord AFB Tacoma WA, as part of the 1705th Air Transport Group 32nd Squadron who were then flying C-118 (DC-6s) to transport mostly personnel. His assignment, however was to train in C-124 transition and he headed to West Palm Beach FL for a three-month global flying program. Upon returning to McChord he began his upgrade training, putting in a year of flying missions that first qualified him for 1st Pilot, and eventually, after passing the rigid two-week “line check,” as Aircraft Commander of a crew and ship of his own. Zinno flew across the Atlantic to Europe and the Pacific to the Orient, Vietnam, and Bangkok, maintaining as well his AFSC Flying Safety. In May 1955 he returned to home base McChord and was assigned to Group Headquarters as Chief of Safety. Where he requested to take a four-month training course at USC in advance subjects qualifying him as aircraft accident investigator. Returning to McChord, he served until 1960, during which time he led an intensive investigation of a C-118 that had crashed in the foothills outside Seattle.

From McChord he was assigned to Keflavik Airport in Iceland to fly C-47s. There he put in another year of arctic bush flying “on a ‘moon-scaped’ island where rain and snow came down horizontally.” Looking for a change he requested an assignment in Europe and was sent to Torreón AFB outside Madrid, Spain. The change had a good

and bad side. The good – he met and married his wife Fran. The bad – Zinno’s job as Operation’s Controller, monitoring military transports and sending help if needed, meant being inside at the command post. He managed to get some time away by flying C-47s to France, Africa, Portugal and elsewhere. Unable to shake the Operation’s Controller job he was transferred to Chateauroux, France, spending 12 hours a day in the newly-established command post, extending from the Mid-Atlantic to Eastern Europe and from the North Pole to the South Pole.

On his days off he flew light planes out of the civilian Vil-Aire's Aero Club, and on one rare vacation flew into a Stuttgart, Germany airport at the same time Charles DeGaulle was landing.



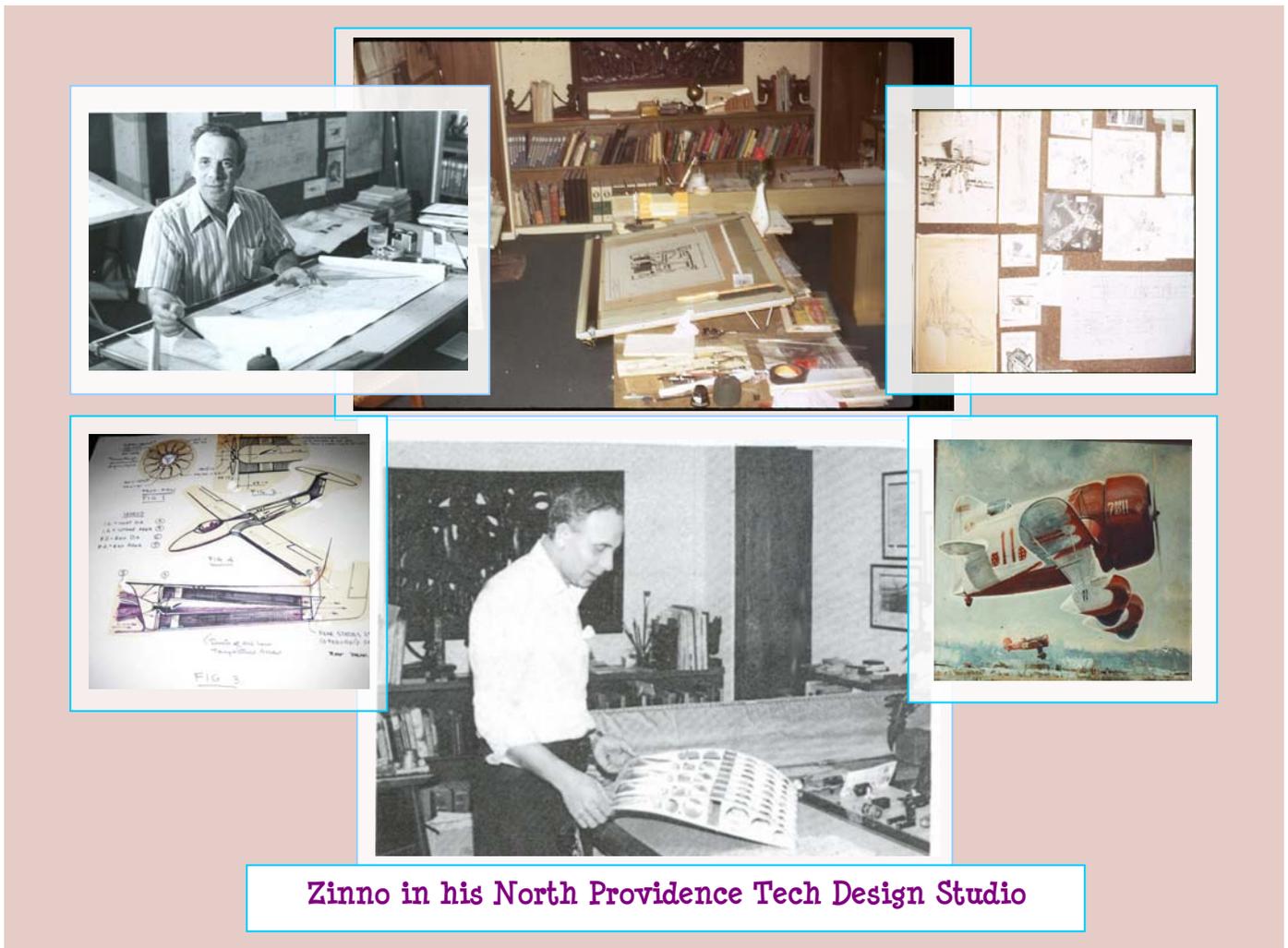
In 1964 with the Vietnam conflict declared, he was assigned to Global Flying at Charleston SC, the 3rd Transport Squadron, first flying C-124s. After transition training at Tinker AFB, Oklahoma City OK, on the new C-141 "Starlifter," he was able to continue flying globally in faster, more efficient, comfortable surroundings. Joe was in and out of Southeast Asia several times a month, responsible for transporting troops and supplies from the Philippines to the Tan Son Nhat airfield in Saigon, Vietnam and flying Air Evac missions, eventually accumulating over 140 combat hours. During an additional 90-day stint of duty as Chief of Operations on Mactan Island (or "Lapu Lapu" as it was called by the crews in remembrance of the island chieftain who was Magellan’s murderer), Zinno brightened the barren transition base with coffee, special food items, and global trinkets to lift the morale of the troops stationed there.



"The beautiful part of this assignment," Zinno says, "was carrying ambulatory patients who needed treatment and getting them to a hospital in the US in 21 hours." He remembers as well with great sadness, the many bodies he took home for burial.

One of his last assignments brought to bear his Chief of Safety classification when in 1965, he was asked to return to McChord AFB WA to lead an investigation into the loss of three C-141s from that station. Finally he went to Norton AFB, San Bernardino CA, flying C-141s to Hawaii, Midway Island, Tokyo and elsewhere to help with global missions until his retirement out of McChord as Lt. Col. on May 1, 1969, Joe never looked back even though they wanted him to stay and fly the new C5As.

Returning to civilian life, Zinno lived in Tacoma a year then moved to North Providence, RI. Now he was able to concentrate on lifelong interests that had been put on hold for military service. Before he was recalled in 1952, he had been enrolled at the Rhode Island School of Design and during his service years, while on missions, he used his spare time to study Architectural Design, Engineering and Mathematics from books he had in his library. He always took advantage of courses offered through the base, for example the USC accident investigation course involving study of aero engineering, public speaking, aviation psychology and aviation physiology. It was not unusual then, that he founded his own design studio called Tech Design and Development out of which he worked as an Industrial Designer.

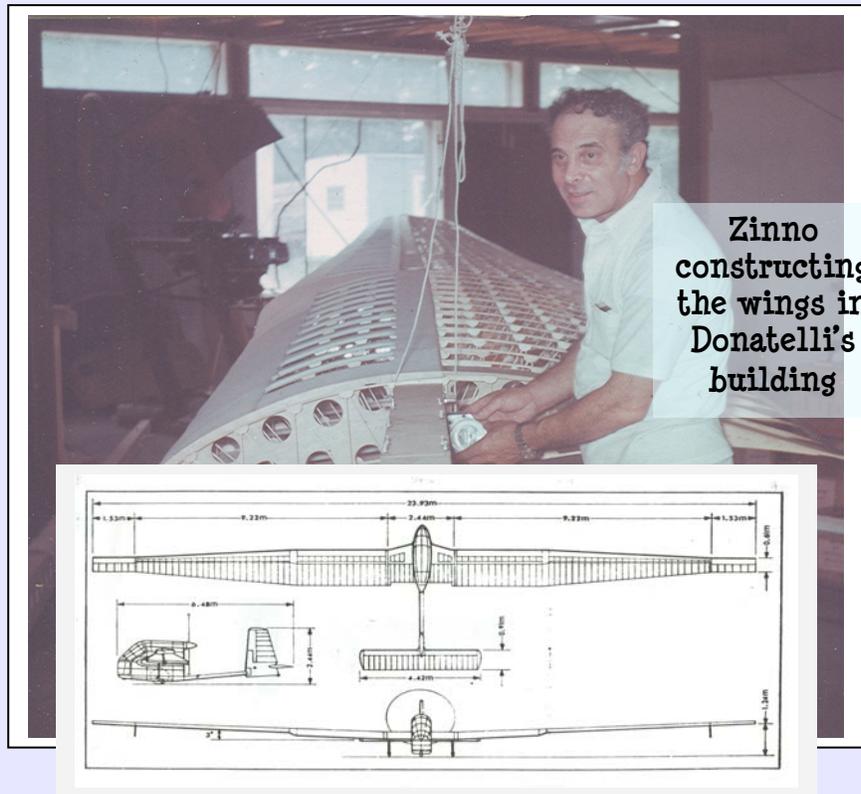
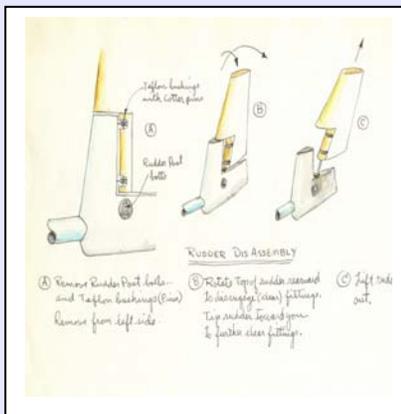


He did not lack for projects and did well. In addition, as an artist, he painted a variety of subjects and his paintings were accepted by leading aviation digests as well as magazine and calendar publishers.

Through the years Zinno had followed man powered flight (MPA) experiments that were going on in Europe, Canada, Japan, Austria, and other countries. Seventeen had actually flown, but he realized the United States wasn't making much progress with their endeavors. He started to gather information about previous MPA attempts and technical data from the Royal Aeronautical Society, MIT, and The Institut Fur Aerodynamik in Stuttgart among others. Then too there was a \$100,000 prize offered by Henry Kremer, a British industrialist, for flying an MPA in a figure eight around two pylons. He made his own sketches and detailed calculations about airfoil lift at low speeds, stress, glide paths, ground effect, drag, and controls. He finally built a six pound, 14' X 2' empennage in his garage. This experience convinced him he should seriously begin designing the MPA. Early calculations on its proposed size made Zinno realize he would need more space and additional help to design and build his plane. He met the five Donatelli brothers who owned a construction company just a mile from his home and they were so fascinated with his project that they offered space in their building large enough to accommodate the 78 foot wings he planned.



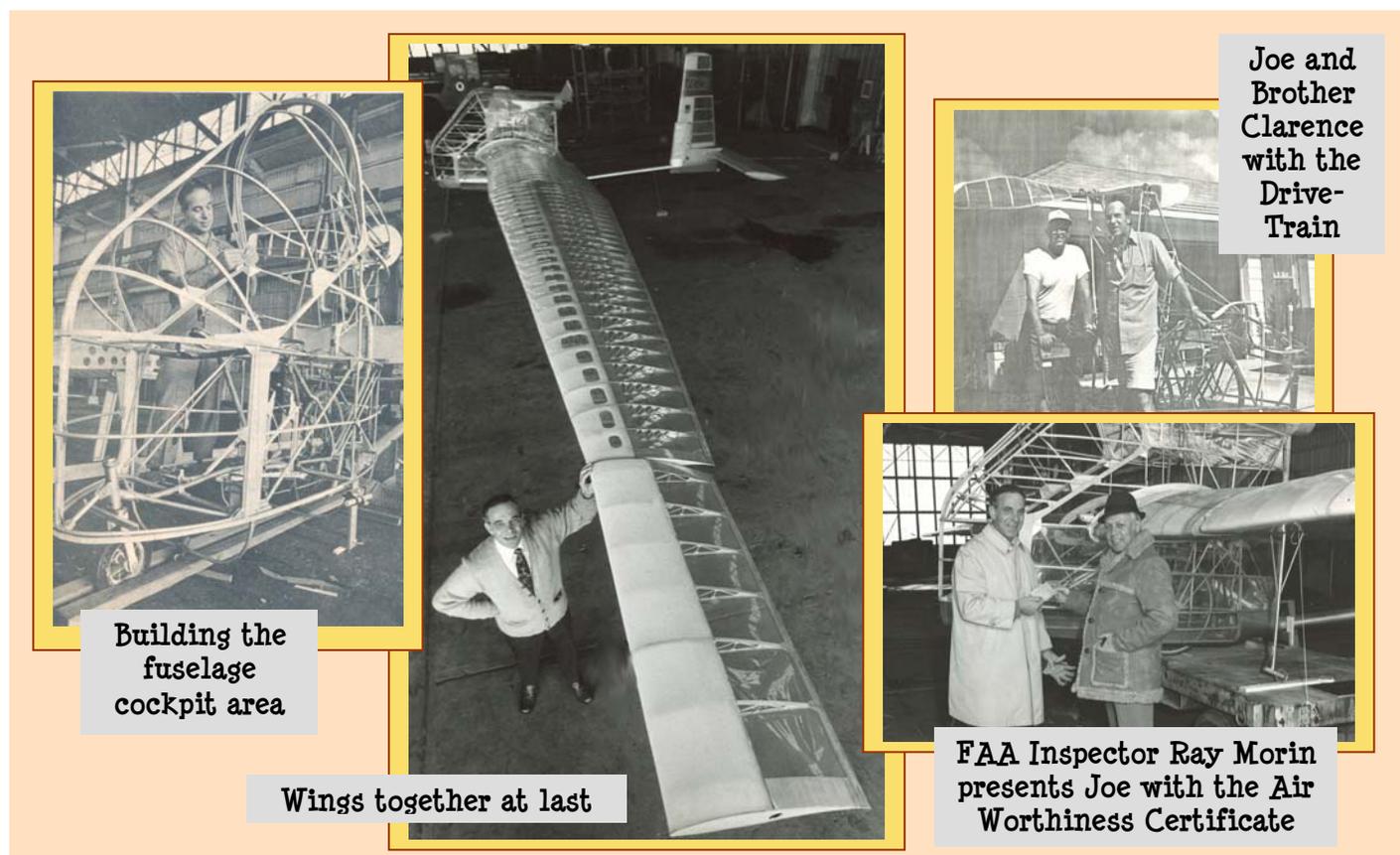
The Empennage



It was no coincidence that Joe's brother, Clarence (remember the ride to see the bi-plane taking off?) was working in his Florida bicycle shop on the drive-train. Joe went there to test the power and talk about the design such as using reciprocating pedals rather than the rotary type generally employed in MPA aircraft, and a triple ratchet hub installed in the rear wheel in place of the usual roll clutches. Clarence completed the design and shipped it to Rhode Island. The pusher design also incorporated a

variable pitch propeller control unit. A flexible cable control with a push-pull knob near the pilot's hand held cross bar, running beneath the seat of the fuselage cockpit, provided adequate nose wheel steering.

The drive-train, empennage, wings and fuselage now needed to be assembled so sufficient space for this, as well as test flights, prompted the search for an airfield with hanger space. The top brass at the Air National Guard at Theodore Francis Green Airport in Providence were not responsive in getting Zinno space to assemble and fly the Olympian; but Ed and Anthony Donatelli, through Joe Lombardo of the Office of Economic Development, got Zinno an appointment with Albert R. Tavani (Director of Airports) in Providence whose office was in Hanger#2 at Quonset Point's inactive Naval Air Station. "We chatted back and forth and after about an hour he set me up in Hanger #3 at Quonset Point and offered to get me anything that I needed." The Donatelli's provided Joe with a trailer to transport the MPA parts to Quonset Point.



"I set up horses to work on it and assemble it and thus began a six-month stint of twelve hour days." During this time Zinno received a lot of publicity and was amazed at the number and kinds of people who responded to his efforts - students, teachers other inventors, newscasters, publishers and "just plain folk." All who innately gained inspiration from Zinno's individual creative drive to accomplish his goal.

In January 1974 Zinno had requested and received a tail number for the Olympian but had been told he would not need an air worthiness certificate because it was not an airplane, now in January 1976 after assembly and just before rollout, the FAA approached him - they changed their mind and said he needed an air worthiness certificate after all. "I made enough noise to the newspapers that they wisely decided to give me my certificate without a prior air check and other standard FAA

requirements. Ray Morin the New England FAA representative, who incidentally had been watching all my efforts anyway, came down and presented me with the certificate." An ironic twist to this is the story of a \$2.95 invoice Joe received in September 1976 from Toronto International Airport for landing fees. Skyline Aviation's cargo plane tail number N11ZB was mistaken for the Olympian's N1ZB. Joe's droll reply congratulated the Operation's Manager for seeing his MPA sitting on Toronto's apron and noted that "the 800 mile trip would have required 53,280 stops in between, Whew!"

Now Zinno was ready to "roll out" and begin trials that were scheduled to be made between April and September 1976. "The Rhode Island National Guard was in the next hangar and in a conversation with Colonel Russell Johnson, I mentioned I needed ten to twelve crew members and his people volunteered." Zinno decided to be the pilot in early trials to get the feel and be able to train a lighter pilot for later tests. He began on Friday, April 16 with a test of the drive-train. The next day trials began at dawn with over a hundred onlookers, journalists and television crews waiting in attendance. He briefed his most faithful journalist, David Gustafson from EAA and cameraman Curt Worden from Channel 12 in Providence and then gave all present a good chase in six runs. He did not leave the ground, nor had he expected to. "I just wanted to get the feel of her today. I'll make a few adjustments over the weekend and be ready to go next week."



On the following Wednesday, April 21, he discovered the ailerons were a problem after three runs. "I duct-taped them down and gained twenty square feet of lifting surface. On the next run, I was completely unprepared when the Olympian suddenly left the ground. In fact we were all surprised - no one was quite ready for this chunk of history that made me the first American to fly a Man Powered Aircraft." Fortunately an Associated Press cameraman was there to film the historic flight and Colonel Russell J. Johnson (RIARNG) recorded the facts: Time: 0816 EST; Winds at 030°/08 mph; liftoff speed: 17.17 mph; distance flown: 77 feet.



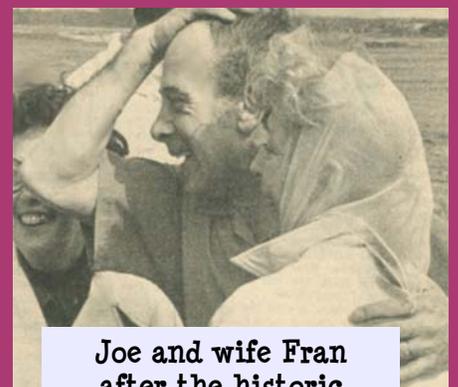
**Crowds gather
Even at sunrise**



She Flies !



I told ya !

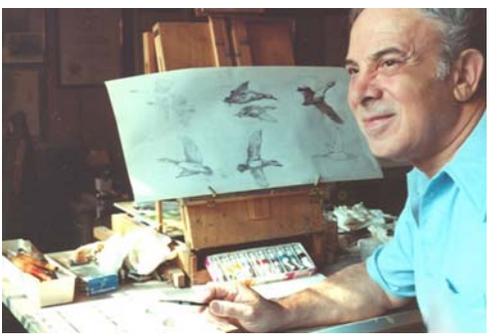
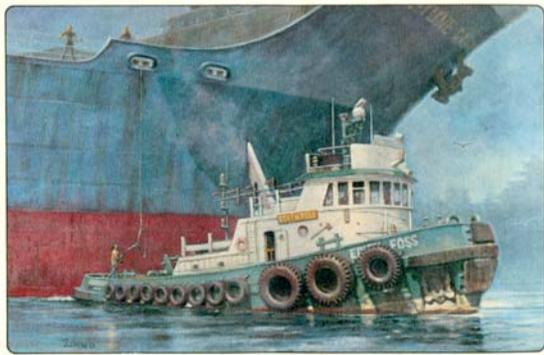


**Joe and wife Fran
after the historic
flight**

Joe continued his trials that summer and fall but over the winter determined a second Olympian would need to be built with a more sturdy Mylar application, rigid ailerons, and a new finely tooled drive-train of lightweight material. Zinno was sure those changes coupled with a lighter pilot would navigate the Kremer course. Several corporations expressed interest in working with Zinno but funds did not materialize. Joe, himself was busy with design projects and teaching architectural and engineering drafting at the Hall Institute of Technology in North Providence. He also had an idea to set up a non-profit open clearing house for MPA endeavors in the United States. Meanwhile arrangements were being made to ship the Olympian I to Oshkosh for permanent display at the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) Aviation Museum. Transport details were delayed so long that the bird fell from cables at the Quonset hanger and only the rudder was salvaged. Then in August 1977, Paul Macready of

Pasadena CA, with help from the scientific community and extensive corporate funds, managed the Kremer course with his Gossamer Condor. That event brought to a close Joe's active involvement with man powered flight.

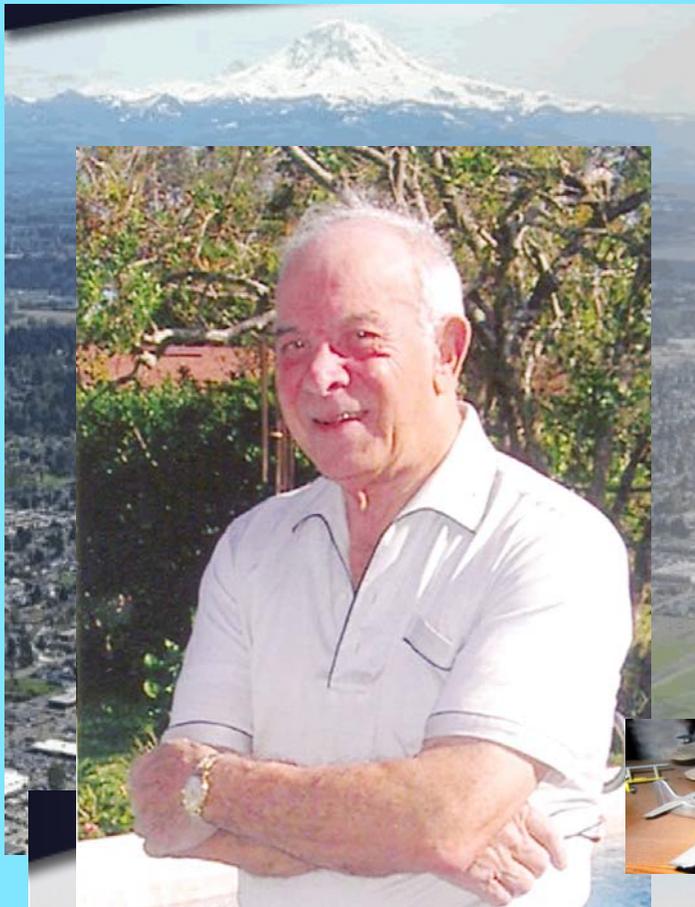
But the aviation world did not forget. Joe's expertise has been sought, not only for his MPA achievement but because he is an artist, designer and seasoned pilot. In 1978 a Majorca Spain BD5 kit designer tried to lure Joe to that part of the world but family considerations bade him choose Federal Way WA to make his new home. From that stronghold he continued to design, paint, and even acted as financial advisor to set up the business plan for the airplane replica model company Ikon N'West; where he also did cut-away layouts, detailed as a real airplane might be constructed. His plans are still being used to build Ikon's models.



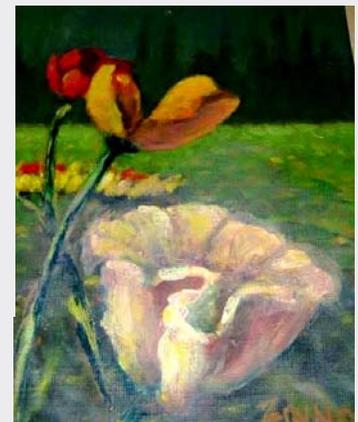
Zinno's Federal Way Studio

Joe has been honored at Kitty Hawk, the Franklin Mint, by community groups and by various local and national aviation organizations. Retirement is not a word he understands; today he still retains his private pilot's license, spends time with fellow pilots at Auburn Municipal Airport, and is active in the local Green River EAA Chapter. "Also, I enjoy a good game of golf when the weather holds," Zinno reports. Recently returned from a European tour, he is reorganizing studio space for some new ideas in concept painting, such as envisioning Amelia Earhart's plane as it rests on the Pacific Ocean floor. Finally, his November 18, 2006 induction into the Rhode Island Aviation Hall of Fame has sparked new interest in Zinno's five-year historic achievement in man powered flight. Old associates and the newer production world are encouraging him to publish a history and provide reference for what could become a NOVA documentary.

Lt Col Joe Zinno in 2006



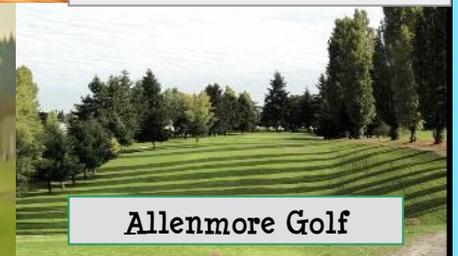
Amelia's Plane



Impressionist Paintings



Auburn Field



Allenmore Golf