

The story of L.I. Early Fliers Club member, Paul Rizzo and his Barren Island Airport

Long Island Early Fliers Education Foundation

January – February 2022 Newsletter

Editor: Fred Coste Volume 7, Issue 1

Happy New Year!

Editor's Note:

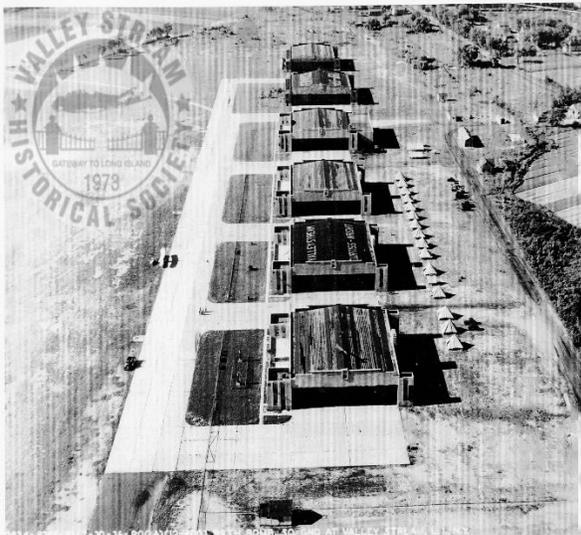
When I learned to fly, one of the first things I was told was to always look for a place where I could set the airplane down safely, in case I had an engine problem. That seemed logical enough. In fact, we even simulated engine out procedures; choosing a field or parking lot as soon as the throttle and carb heat were pulled to idle. I had to tell the instructor where I was going to land and fly the plane down, while positioning so that when I ran out of altitude, I could put the plane on the ground without running out of space to come to a stop.

I remember a similar discussion with Paul Rizzo, who spoke of being able to land anywhere, when he learned to fly some 50 years earlier. In fact, his first encounter with an airplane was when a Curtiss JN-4, "Jenny" made a forced landing near his school in Canarsie, Brooklyn. Paul quickly pointed out that things were far less crowded then. There were no regulations, in those days. You could land or takeoff from anywhere you had the room. Nobody minded; not even the cops. If you had to go get fuel, sometimes the cops would even watch the plane for you until you got back!

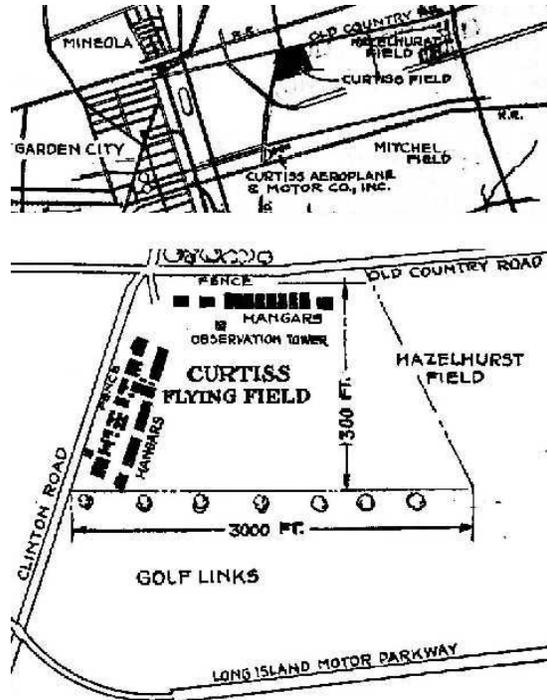


Curtiss JN-4 "Jenny"

When Paul was 22, he was able to buy his own Jenny. He had been working as a mechanic, repairing and restoring Model T Fords, when he heard about a plane that had been repossessed and needed work at Curtiss Field. Paul had that plane in working order not long after. Though he had been in airplanes before, Paul realized he should learn how to fly before taking people up for rides. He went to the local library and borrowed the book: *Fly an Airplane*. Paul spent the next two weeks teaching himself to fly.



Curtiss Field, Garden City



The year was 1926 and Paul's first flight was not exactly smooth. The engine lost power due to a cooling problem and he was forced to land not far from the airport. It was a simple fix and Paul went on to finish his first solo that day. It wasn't long before Paul decided to become a stunt pilot.

World's Greatest Event!
HEART THRILLING
-AEROPLANE STUNTS-
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Her First Exhibition Flight In America In Honor Of
15th N. Y. INF.

Just Returned From Europe
And Proclaimed By France,
Germany, Holland and Swit-
zerland To Be The World's
Greatest Woman Flyer.

See With Your Own Eyes
This Great Woman Flyer In
Her Own Plane, Made in
Holland, Doing Tail Spins,
Banking and Loop-the-Loop.
8 Other Sensational Flights
By American Aces.

15th Infantry Band Concert During Flights
THIS SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 3RD AT 3:30 P.M.
Curtiss Field, Garden City, Long Island

Admission \$1.00 **Tickets on Sale At This Office**
CHILDREN UNDER 12, 50 CENTS

Direction to Field: Long Island Railroad From Pennsylvania
Station, Or Flatbush Ave., Brooklyn, To Garden City or
Mineola, Sightseeing Buses to Field.
Under Auspices of the Chicago Defender the World's Great-
est Weekly.

Buses leave 138th Street and 7th Avenue every fifteen
minutes between 12 and 2:30 P. M.

After getting advice from a more experienced pilot at Curtiss Field, Paul practiced spin recovery. He remembered the advice he had been given; “if you keep pulling back on the stick during the spin, you will surely hit the ground.”



Paul in his Jenny

After another few weeks, it was time to start a flight school. Charging \$25 per hour, Paul was kept busy teaching people all day long. To raise extra money, he also dropped leaflets and gave sightseeing rides to the adventurous and curious.

One day, Paul decided to visit a friend who lived on Barren Island; a desolate place that had a population of about 1500. It was flat, remote and at the base of Flatbush Avenue. A great place for an airport.

The father of Paul's friend turned out to be the caretaker of a large expanse of Barren Island. With his help, Paul arranged the rental of the property for \$15.00 per month and he opened Brooklyn's first commercial airport in 1927.

Before long and partly thanks to the successful flight of Charles Lindberg, there were hundreds of people who wanted to learn to fly, and even more who wanted sightseeing rides. The airport became very popular with airshows and \$2.00 airplane rides every Sunday.

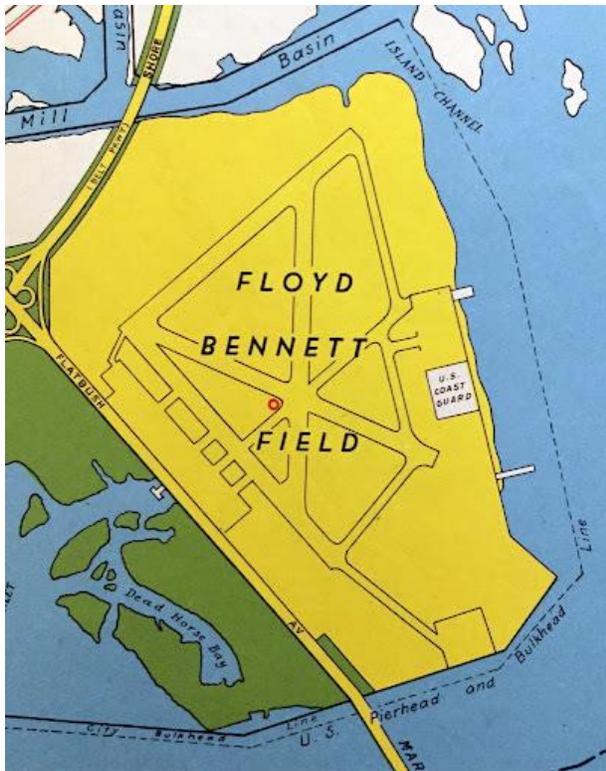


Paul, flying a Waco over Jamaica Bay with two wing walkers

It wasn't long after, that the City of New York decided that they too should cash in on aviation activities. To that end, the city started planning its first municipal airport to be named in honor of Floyd Bennett.

Bennett, a naval aviator and Brooklyn resident, had been the pilot for Commander Richard E. Byrd's flight over the North Pole in 1926. Both Bennett and Byrd were recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor for their feat.

Construction of Floyd Bennett Field began in 1929, next to where Paul already had developed his Barren Island Airport. Floyd Bennet Field opened on May 23, 1931. Ten years later, the airport became a Naval Air Station only months prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor.



This area used to be known as Paul Rizzo's Barren Island Airport

Ever resilient, Paul moved his planes to a new airfield not long after Floyd Bennett opened, but times were changing. There were many new government restrictions and regulations that had to be complied with. However, people were still intrigued and inspired by aviation and Paul kept barnstorming and selling sightseeing rides,

In March 1939, Paul enlisted in the Army Reserve, and in 1942 he was in the Army Air Force Ferry Command and Military Air Transport Command. He ferried many fighters and bombers across the Atlantic and throughout the United States. He served 23 years in the Air Force and retired as an Air Force Major. He served in World War II in the United States Army Air Corp's 2nd Ferrying Group, Ferrying Division, Air Transport Command, at New Castle Army Base, Wilmington, Delaware from October

1942 to May 1946. He held the rating of SSP, Senior Service Pilot. Rizzo delivered military aircraft throughout the U.S. ranging from single engine fighters to four engine bombers.

Later with (MATS) Military Air Transport Command he flew C54's across the Atlantic to the European and African theaters. Piloting the C54's overseas he carried cargo and personnel to foreign shores and on the return trips carried litter cases back to the U.S. During his military career, Paul flew P47, P51, P63, AT6, B25, B26, A26, B17, B24, C54, and A20's. He totaled 1,205 hours of military flying.

Paul and I have been members of both the Long Island Early Fliers Club and the Long Island Hangar of Quiet Birdmen. During a QB meeting at the 56th Fighter Group in Farmingdale, Paul got up to tell us a story one evening. He began:

"One night there were about 10 of us being brought back to the States after dropping off various aircraft in England. It was cold in the plane and most of the guys were wrapped up in blankets, trying to get some sleep.

I couldn't sleep. I was cold and restless, so I decided to go up front and talk to the flight crew. I pulled the curtain aside and these two guys looked panic stricken; almost frozen with fear.

I asked what the hell was going on as I scanned the instruments. The altimeter indicated we were descending though 1,200 feet; manifold pressure was between 10 and 14 inches on all four gauges. We had less than two minutes before ditching in the ice cold Atlantic.

*******LIEFEF News*******

I lunged forward, pulled the throttle and mixture back, killed the ignition while ramming the mixture and throttle back up, then hit the ignition. BANG! The backfire instantly kicked the ice out and the manifold pressure shot up to 42 inches.

The descent slowed from over 500 feet per minute to just under 500 FPM. I repeated the procedure on the second engine. With a loud BANG, the manifold pressure came up and the descent slowed to about 200 feet per minute.

We were now under 500 feet in altitude. You could see the white caps in the moonlight. Number 3 – BANG, but the manifold pressure only came up to about 22 inches; enough to hold us at about 300 feet above the water. Number 4 – BANG and, as the manifold pressure started to move up to 40 inches, I repeated the procedure on number 3.

It worked! My background in working on both car and aircraft engines saved us all and made it possible for me to tell you this story tonight.”

Paul went west at age 94, still an active pilot. I miss sitting with him by the fire at the 56th Fighter Group. He was always cheerful, and always had a good story to tell.



Our most recent meeting was held on November 21st. The featured speaker was Program Chairman Milton Josephs, who told the stirring story about the loss of his cousin, who was a navigator on a Halifax bomber during World War II. Milton's Power Point presentation also provided a great deal of interesting detail about the triumphs and hardships endured by these air crews.

December 12th was the date of our Holiday Party. The food was again outstanding and featured the addition of filet mignon to the menu.

We are now in our winter break period, but the Wednesday Work Group will continue to meet. We are hoping to complete several ongoing projects because we are happy to announce that we will be opening for public tours on Sundays, starting this spring.

Please look for further announcements!

Our next scheduled Membership Meeting will be held on Sunday, May 15th. Please note that we normally try to have our first meeting in April, however Palm Sunday and Easter fall on the second and third Sundays in April. Therefore we have chosen to resume our meetings on the third Sunday in May.

In other meeting announcements:

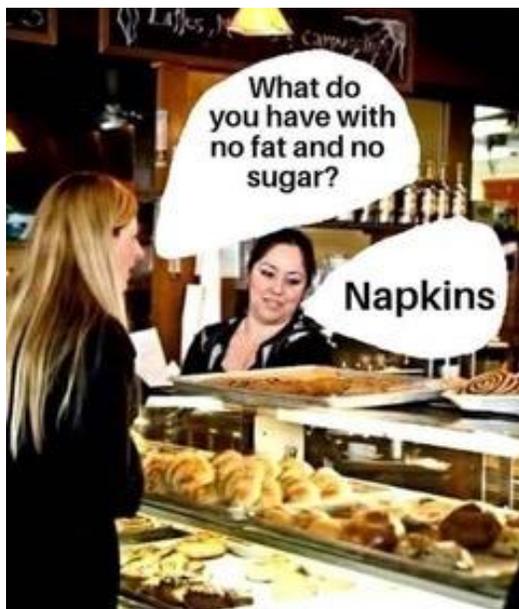
Membership Dues bills and I.D. cards will be going out shortly. Please look for our mailing in early to mid-January.

Check out our website at www.liefef.org

We hope to see
you Sunday,
May 15th



Time to smile.....



This is the first year I'm not going to Fiji due to COVID-19.
I usually don't go because I'm poor.



So many people these days are too judgemental.
I can tell just by looking at them.

**I don't always
go the extra
mile, but when
I do it's because
I missed my
exit.**

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It's called quarantine coffee. It's just like normal coffee but it has margarita in it and also no coffee.



*And just like that Uncle Mike
was never asked to Babysit again.*



**WITHOUT A SINGLE DEGREE, THEY BUILT US
ROADS THAT HAVE LASTED AN ETERNITY..**



AND THEN, THE ENGINEERS ARRIVED!!!



Long Island Early Fliers Education Foundation

Bayport Aerodrome,
Bayport, NY



P.O. Box 43, Holbrook, NY
11741

Membership Application

Name: _____

Annual Dues*

Address: _____

Individual membership: \$35.00

Family membership: \$50.00

Email: _____

I am applying for:

Occupation: _____

Individual ___ Family ___ Membership

Names of family members joining: _____

Background information: (Please check all that apply)

Aviation Enthusiast	Private Pilot	Work(ed) in aviation industry	
Model Builder	Commercial Pilot	Aviation mechanic	
History Buff	Airline Pilot	Aircraft owner	
Computer technician	Enjoy writing	Enjoy photography	

I, _____, being interested in the preservation of all facets of aviation history, particularly that pertaining to Long Island's aviation heritage, do hereby apply for membership in the Long Island Early Fliers Education Foundation.

(signature)

(date)

The Long Island Early Fliers Education Foundation. is a non-profit organization, founded in 1956 and chartered by the New York State Education Department. It is dedicated to recording, preserving and disseminating information about aviation and Long Island's Aviation Heritage.

Donations of cash and aviation artifacts are tax deductible and always appreciated.

Donations of your time and talent are also gratefully accepted.

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Long Island Early Fliers Education Foundation

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www.liefef.org

Long Island Early Fliers Education Foundation is a non-profit organization founded in 1956 and Chartered by the New York State Education Department. We are dedicated to aviation education and preserving Long Island's aviation heritage. Volunteers who want to help educate and preserve our history are always welcome. Annual Membership in our organization is \$35.00 for individuals; \$50.00 for families.

Donations of aviation memorabilia, aircraft and aircraft parts, aviation clothing, display quality models and items of historic significance are always welcome and greatly appreciated.

Cash donations, as well as artifact donations are tax deductible. You may visit our facility at Bayport Aerodrome, Vitamin Drive, Bayport New York most Wednesdays between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Appointments are necessary as airports are secure locations and can also be arranged at other times for your convenience. Contact us at: L.I.E.F.E.F., P.O. Box 43, Holbrook, NY, 11741 or call (631)-523-5407 (Fred Coste) or fax: 631-588-2147

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