KATHERINE STINSON – THE FLYING SCHOOLGIRL

News / Personalities

27 of September 1913 Katherine Stinson becomes the first woman in the United States to make an official airmail flight. So let's find out more about her.

Known as the **Flying Schoolgirl**, **Katherine Stinson** became just the fourth woman in the U.S. to earn her pilot’s license on July 24, 1912.

Born on Valentine’s Day, February 14, 1891 in Fort Payne, Alabama, America’s sweetheart (look at that face!) aviatrix learned to fly at Cicero Field in Chicago at **Max Lillie’s Flying School**, where on July 18, 1915 she became the first female pilot in the world to perform a loop-the-loop.

For Stinson, the plan was to earn her pilot’s license, perform stunt flying and use the earned money to pay for her music lessons.

She liked flying too much and put her piano plans on hold to become one of the more daring pilots

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on the planet.

Now… being a woman, no one wanted to let her train to be a flyer… but after a bit of coaxing with *Max Lillie*, a pilot used by the *Wright Brothers* to demo their planes, she was able to get a lesson, and after a mere four hours, she was soloing.

In 1913 Katherine and her mother created **Stinson Aviation Company** to rent and sell airplanes – though that closed up shop by 1917. Katherine's younger sister, *Marjorie Stinson*, was employed by her sister's flying school as their chief instructor.

Katherine also taught her brother Eddie to fly. *Eddie Anderson Stinson Jr.* (July 11, 1893 – January 26, 1932), died in a plane crash in 1932, but at that time was considered the world's most-experienced pilot in flight hours, with over 16,000 hours logged.

Marjorie Stinson – she was inducted into the **U.S. Aviation Reserve Corps**, as its only woman, in 1915.

While the Stinson Flying School was in operation, the Stinson women, Katherine (on the left) and Marjorie were the hot-shot pilots and trainers. Brother Eddie (middle) was the school's engineer.

In 1916, with the war in Europe raging, the **Royal Canadian Flying Corps** began sending their cadets to the Stinson School for training. Stinson became known as "***The Flying Schoolmarm***" and her students as "***The Texas Escadrille***." The Escadrille was a group of pilots who would fly for France during WWI.

On the exhibition flying circuit, newspapers pegged Katherine with the *Flying Schoolgirl*moniker, despite the fact that she was 21-years-old. The newspapers liked the angle that she looked 16.

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She became one of the first officially authorized female pilots to fly airmail for the U.S.

During WWI, Stinson flew a **Curtiss *JN-4D (Jenny)*** and a Curtiss ***Stinson-Special***that was a special single-seat Jenny built to her specifications, using both to raise fund for the **American Red Cross**.

The Curtiss Stinson-Special, built just for Katherine Stinson.

During that time of exhibition flying, Stinson made all sorts of record flights… setting a distance and endurance flight in Canada (I can't find the endurance number), flying 175 miles.

She also set a new American distance record on December 11, 1917, when she flew 606 miles between San Diego and San Francisco, breaking a record previously held by *Ruth Law*.

In 1917, Katherine toured the Orient, and was the first woman to fly in Japan or China.

Stinson was asked back to Edmonton in 1917 to demonstrate her skill at the summer exhibition. On this return engagement, as before, she was doing a tour of Western fairs. The plane that she had flown in Calgary had been damaged, so she was sent a different plane.

Problems with this machine led to a spectacular crash landing during her performance.

After the plane was repaired Stinson exhibited many of the aerial maneuvers being used in "dogfights" over Europe at the time, as well as smoke writing.

The grand finale consisted of dropping a dummy bomb on an "enemy trench" prepared for the show.

In 1918 Katherine Stinson announced she would return to the Edmonton fair, and while in Calgary she was appointed an official mail carrier and handed a sack of first class mail stamped " *Aeroplane Mail Service, July 9, 1918*".

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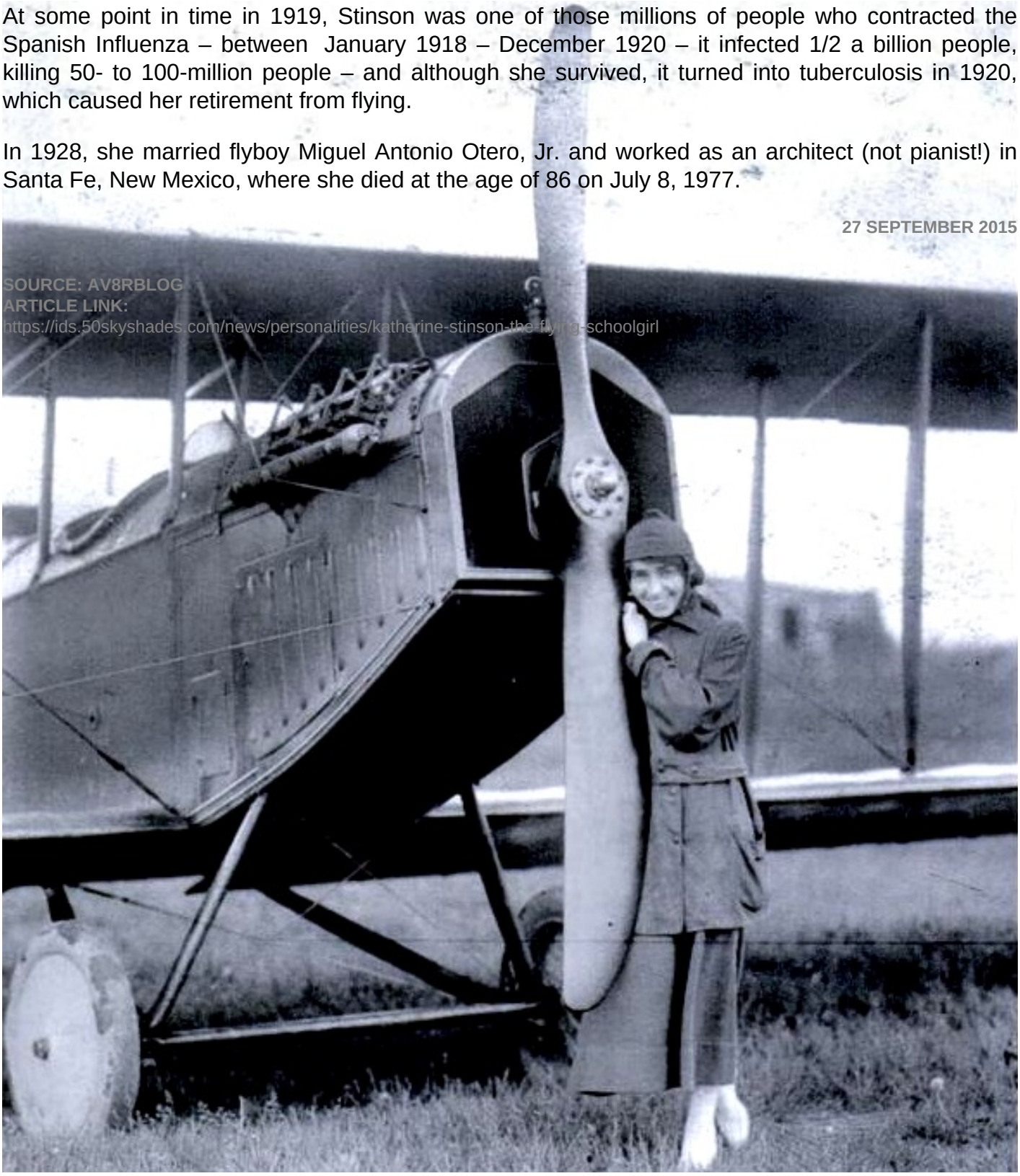
Seven miles north of Calgary her military-type Jenny developed mechanical problems, and she had to land for repairs. She returned to Calgary where she started again, following the old Calgary and Edmonton Railway line. Stinson flew over the Edmonton Exhibition grounds at about eight o'clock, landing in front of the grandstand on the infield.

This was the first official airmail flight in Western Canada, second in Canada only to a Montreal-Toronto run completed two weeks earlier by Captain Brian Peck.

At some point in time in 1919, Stinson was one of those millions of people who contracted the Spanish Influenza – between January 1918 – December 1920 – it infected 1/2 a billion people, killing 50- to 100-million people – and although she survived, it turned into tuberculosis in 1920, which caused her retirement from flying.

In 1928, she married flyboy Miguel Antonio Otero, Jr. and worked as an architect (not pianist!) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she died at the age of 86 on July 8, 1977.

27 SEPTEMBER 2015



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