

# Flier helped guide course of OC aviation

He no longer pilots airplanes, but his aviator spirit still soars high.

The founder of what are now Martin Aviation Inc. and John Wayne Airport, Eddie Martin, 88, is a living reminder that aviation has come a long way since the post-World War I era.

His Santa Ana home, decorated with photographs, awards, aviation memorabilia and even aviation wallpaper, takes the aviation aficionado back to the days when planes had to be cranked to get the propeller started, when there was no guidance instrumentation and when government aviation regulations were virtually nonexistent.

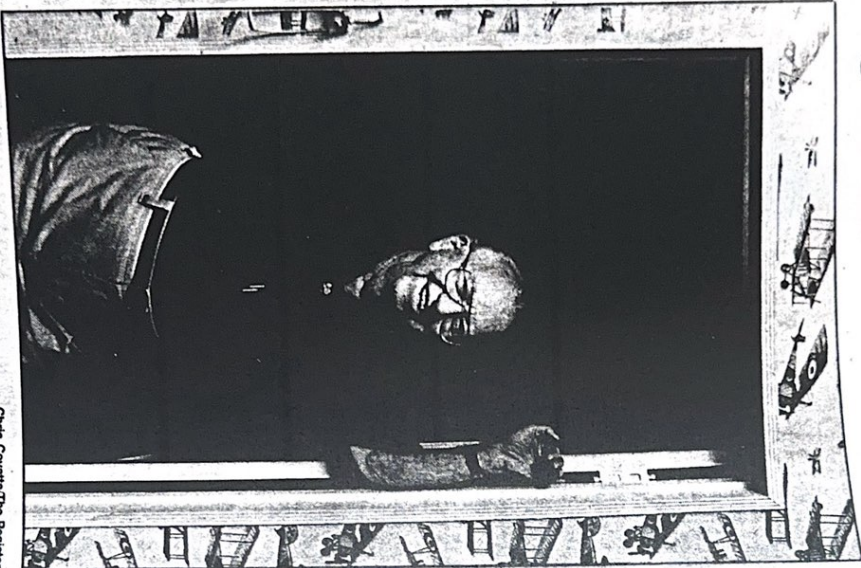
From 1921 until the early 1960s, when he retired as a commercial pilot, Martin witnessed not only the evolution of aviation, but the transformation of Orange County from a wide-open region where a pilot could make an emergency landing just about anywhere to a major urban and aviation center.

The aviation bug, which bit him at age 20, later got to brothers Johnny and Floyd as well. The three of them, at different times, owned Martin Aviation Inc., originally the Eddie Martin School of Aviation.

Surprisingly, Martin never dreamed of becoming a pilot when he was growing up, but said he got into aviation "by accident."

In 1921, when he was 20, he worked in an Oldsmobile garage owned by a Minnesota family. The family's son, who had just gotten out of the Army in Texas, taught him how to fly and, before long, Martin became a pilot.

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Chris Covatta/The Register

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Cessnas, Pipers and other of today's well-known airplane brands were unheard of.

Martin said he became a commercial pilot in 1929 and that during his 36-year commercial flying career, he flew for Western Airlines, McMillan Petroleum Corp. and American Airways, now known as American Airlines.

During that time, he also became acquainted with the likes of Charles Lindbergh and Howard Hughes, and flew thousands of times, all over the United States and occasionally to Canada, Cuba and Mexico.

Nowadays, despite his aviation accomplishments, Martin prefers to keep a low profile, devoting much of his time to his real-estate holdings.

"I made (up) my mind at a very early age to acquire as much land as possible so that I could live comfortably," Martin said.

He would not even discuss how many flying hours he logged in his 36-year commercial aviation career, preferring to talk instead on what it was like to be a pilot in the early days when planes were simple by today's standards — but so much more fun to fly.

"Flying is not what it used to be," he said. "Nowadays you get into one of those big planes, push a couple of buttons and it takes you where you want to go."

Being a pilot was something that gave him so much enjoyment that if he had it to do all over again, he would not hesitate.

"If you really want to succeed, you got to love what you do," Martin said. "My whole life has been a vacation, and I haven't had a single vacation all my

Martin said.

In those days, "you could count (Orange County) pilots with one hand's fingers," he said.

WEDNESDAY EVENING

MARCH 28, 1990

# Eddie Martin, pioneer aviator who opened OC airport, dies

By Laura Saari  
The Register

Aviation pioneer Eddie Martin, who opened Orange County's first airport and shared runways with the greats from Lindbergh to Earhart, died Tuesday. He was 88.

Officials at St. Joseph Hospital of Orange said Mr. Martin was admitted there Monday. A longtime friend, Vi Smith, public relations coordinator for Martin Aviation, said he died at 9:10 p.m.

She said he had been suffering for about a year from a number of illnesses, including cardiac prob-

lems and cancer. No funeral arrangements have been made.

Mr. Martin, of Santa Ana, opened Orange County's first airport in 1923 with land leased from James Irvine at the corner of Main Street and Newport Avenue.

With a 43-year career as airport operator, corporate flier, commercial aviator and test pilot, Mr. Mar-

**VANGUARD:** Martin's career paralleled growth of aviation/8  
**EX-OC OFFICIAL:** Promoter of parks, Dana Point Harbor dies/B-1

tin's life nearly spanned the length of aviation history. Orville Wright signed his pilot's license.

Mr. Martin knew all the greats. Charles Lindbergh stopped at the Eddie Martin Airport. So did Amelia Earhart. Howard Hughes set a world speed record on a course just north of the airport.

"He was probably one of the most honest people I've ever known," Smith said. "He had a great sense of integrity and dedication. He was this county's most treasured resource."

Smith said he was a modest man. Please see **MARTIN/8**



Eddie Martin in 1989  
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# MARTIN: Aviation pioneer climbed atop a biplane — at 3,000 feet — to promote first OC airport

FROM 1 suffered from cancer, cardiac problems and other complications — he hadn't let his buddies down. "People used to come in and just wait for Eddie. If he didn't come in, they'd just leave. They wouldn't even eat," Kessler said.

They came to hear him talk about his 43-year career in aviation, a career that included founding Orange County's first airport in 1924.

"He'd hold court," said Bill Bettis, a longtime friend of Martin's. "People just knew, if you want to talk to Eddie Martin or find out anything happening around town,

he was there. I don't think there was anybody I'd ever met that he hadn't already met. He knew everybody."

Bettis, a pilot, owns Santa Ana's Nieuport 17 restaurant — named after the "fastest plane on the West Coast," the same plane Martin flew in the late 1920s and 1930s. He and Martin frequently talked about flying, and Martin every year served as the center of attention when the Blue Angels held a party at the restaurant.

"But Eddie was a great guy whether he flew airplanes or not. I just loved him. He was almost like

a daddy to me," Bettis said. Martin was a baby when his family migrated to Orange County from San Jacinto in a covered wagon.

Few remember Martin's early days of flying.

But engineer Millard Boyd, 91, was there when Martin discovered that World War I pilot Penny Peterson had bought a war-surplus airplane, a Standard model J-1, and was willing to give Martin his first lesson at the end of Fourth Street in Santa Ana.

"Eddie made a deal to take lessons, a dollar a ride," Boyd said.

"He'd save up a dollar and take a lesson, then when he saved up another dollar, he could take another lesson."

Martin was lucky, Boyd said. He knew what he wanted to do from the time he sat in his father's apple orchard in Santa Ana and looked up at the clouds and wondered what they looked like from the top.

He wanted to fly.

"You should remember him as a man who knew what he wanted to do and went all-out in order to do it," Boyd said.

Martin had few regrets. But there was one, and it had to do with

a hamburger.

As a young boy, his father took him to a restaurant to eat his first hamburger, said Marvin Tuomala, president of Martin Aviation, which Martin founded and later sold.

Martin was too shy to eat in front of other people.

"To the day he died, he regretted not taking a bite from that hamburger," Tuomala said. "He could still smell the aroma."

Plagued with terrible shyness, Martin nevertheless mustered the courage to start a business — the airport. He did so by squatting on

land belonging to the Irvine family.

To promote the business, Martin leetered 3,000 feet up on the top wing of a biplane. No ankle straps. No parachute.

Services for Martin will be held at 11 a.m. Monday at Waverley Church, Santa Ana. A private burial will be at Westminister Memorial Park and Mortuary. Visitation will be from 2 to 6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday at the mortuary.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to the American Cancer Society's Orange County unit.

## OC airport founder Martin lived for flying, friends say

By Laura Saari  
The Register

It was a lousy day for flying. The dark, gray clouds that shrouded Orange County on Wednesday seemed fitting on a day when scores of people mourned the death of aviation pioneer Eddie Martin.

Throughout Southern California, friends and aviation buffs gathered to remember Martin and tell tales much like the ones Martin told to anyone who seemed at all interested.

At Bristol's restaurant in Santa Ana, where the 88-year-old

Martin and his buddies ate breakfast every day at 6:30 a.m., Martin's favorite waitress, Karie Kessler, had turned his table over to a stranger.

On Monday he had sat there, she said, ordering his customary "poached eggs, real soft-burnt toast, two jellies, hot coffee, extra ... napkins and 1½ glasses of orange juice."

Too sick and weak to talk, Martin had motioned to her with hand signals. He asked a friend to do the ordering. But despite his illnesses — Martin long had

Please see MARTIN/9

## MARTIN: Wright brother signed pilot's license

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Riley said he was shocked to hear of Mr. Martin's death.

"There is only one Eddie Martin," he said. "He was a feisty guy. It's difficult for me to imagine him not being here with us. He met a lot of challenges in life."

Mr. Martin's mainstay in his early days of flight was a Jenny, a biwing airplane often used by barnstormers. He would take off from a grassy strip about a mile and a half northwest of what is now John Wayne Airport.

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Mr. Martin had some good times in that plane, some better-than-average times, to be sure, not the least of which was the time he teetered, standing up, devil-may-care on the wings, 3,000 feet up, drumming up interest in his airplane business.

"I could get out on that wing just like a cat," he said in an interview. "I trusted my pilot. I'd just soloed (final stage of flight lessons) him six weeks before that."

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But he never lost his enthusiasm for flight. Recently, he remembered how he longed to fly from a very young age.

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He took up flying in 1921, and from the beginning knew that was what he would do with his life.

Hellbent on having a place of his own, he started by squatting on some Irvine Ranch property in 1923.

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By 1933, he had the premiere airport on the coast with many

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In the 10 years he had been in business, Martin had trained more than 500 pilots and scores of others had begun training. He maintained a 100 percent rating for safety — an unheard-of record in the barnstorming days of aviation.

It wasn't always easy. During the Depression, Martin also flew for Western Air Express to help pay off a \$700 debt. In the process, he became the first pilot for the airline who had not been trained by the Army.

It wasn't long before he went to work as a test pilot for Lockheed, testing P-38s.

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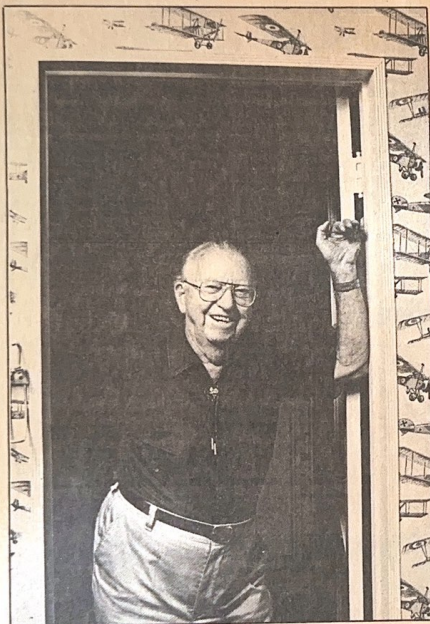
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It was then that Martin knew aviation would be his career, despite the frequently dangerous flying conditions.

In those days, once the pilot was airborne, he was on his own. There were no tower controls,



Chris Covatta/The Register

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mainly because the planes themselves had no radio or instruments that could link the ship to the ground, Martin said. Pilots did not even file flight plans.

"They just gave us weather forecasts and that's about it,"

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— Enrique Rangel/The Register

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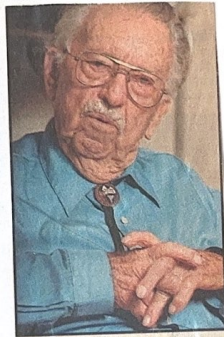
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He took up flying in 1921, and from the beginning knew that was what he would do with his life.

Hellbent on having a place of his own, he started by squatting on some Irvine Ranch property in 1923.

It was several months before he got up the nerve to talk to ranch owner James Irvine, who was opposed to aviation, about formalizing the deal.

But by June, the two had reached an agreement, with Martin paying \$35 a month for 80 acres of land, and the Eddie Martin Airport was born.

Martin Aviation operated on a shoestring, with Martin's entire business consisting of a Curtiss JN-4D plane and a wooden toolbox.

By 1933, he had the premiere airport on the coast with many

aircraft, five hangars, airport boundary lights and a 2 million candlepower locating beam.

In the 10 years he had been in business, Martin had trained more than 500 pilots and scores of others had begun training. He maintained a 100 percent rating for safety — an unheard-of record in the barnstorming days of aviation.

It wasn't always easy. During the Depression, Martin also flew for Western Air Express to help pay off a \$700 debt. In the process, he became the first pilot for the airline who had not been trained by the Army.

It wasn't long before he went to work as a test pilot for Lockheed, testing P-38s.

His flying skills were so respected that he became one of the few pilots allowed to ferry other Lockheed test pilots back to home base. He later became a senior pilot for Lockheed.

In later years, Martin worked as a pilot for American Airlines' predecessor, American Airways, and as a corporate pilot for Macmillan Oil Co.



# MARTIN: Aviation pioneer climbed atop a biplane — at 3,000 feet — to promote first OC airport

FROM 1 suffered from cancer, cardiac problems and other complications — he hadn't let his buddies down. "People used to come in and just wait for Eddie. If he didn't come in, they'd just leave. They wouldn't even eat," Kessler said.

They came to hear him talk about his 43-year career in aviation, a career that included founding Orange County's first airport in 1923.

"He'd hold court," said Bill Bettis, a longtime friend of Martin's. "People just knew, if you want to talk to Eddie Martin or find out anything happening around town, he was there. I don't think there was anybody I'd ever met that he hadn't already met. He knew everybody."

Bettis, a pilot, owns Santa Ana's Nieuport 17 restaurant — named after the "fastest plane on the West Coast," the same plane Martin flew in the late 1920s and 1930s. He and Martin frequently talked about flying, and Martin every year served as the center of attention when the Blue Angels held a party at the restaurant.

"But Eddie was a great guy whether he flew airplanes or not. I just loved him. He was almost like a daddy to me," Bettis said.

Martin was a baby when his family migrated to Orange County from San Jacinto in a covered wagon.

Few remember Martin's early days of flying.

But engineer Millard Boyd, 91, was there when Martin discovered that World War I pilot Penny Peterson had bought a war-surplus airplane, a Standard model J-1, and was willing to give Martin his first lesson at the end of Fourth Street in Santa Ana.

"Eddie made a deal to take lessons, a dollar a ride," Boyd said.

"He'd save up a dollar and take a lesson, then when he saved up another dollar, he could take another lesson."

Martin was lucky, Boyd said. He knew what he wanted to do from the time he sat in his father's apple orchard in Santa Ana and looked up at the clouds and wondered what they looked like from the top.

"You should remember him as a man who knew what he wanted to do and went all-out in order to do it," Boyd said.

Martin had few regrets. But there was one, and it had to do with a hamburger.

As a young boy, his father took him to a restaurant to eat his first hamburger, said Martin Tuomala, president of Martin Aviation, which Martin founded and later sold.

Martin was too shy to eat in front of other people.

"To the day he died, he regretted not taking a bite from that hamburger," Tuomala said. "He could still smell the aroma."

Plagued with terrible shyness, Martin nevertheless mustered the courage to start a business — the airport. He did so by squatting on land belonging to the Irvine family.

To promote the business, Martin teetered 3,000 feet up on the top wing of a biplane. No ankle straps, no parachute.

Services for Martin will be held at 11 a.m. Monday at Waverley Church, Santa Ana. A private burial will be at Westminster Memorial Park and Mortuary. Visitation will be from 2 to 6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday at the mortuary.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to the American Cancer Society's Orange County unit.

## OC airport founder Martin lived for flying, friends say

By Laura Saari  
The Register

It was a lousy day for flying. The dark, gray clouds that shrouded Orange County on Wednesday seemed fitting on a day when scores of people mourned the death of aviation pioneer Eddie Martin.

Throughout Southern California, friends and aviation buffs gathered to remember Martin and tell tales much like the ones Martin told to anyone who seemed at all interested.

At Bristol's restaurant in Santa Ana, where the 88-year-old

Martin and his buddies ate breakfast every day at 6:30 a.m., Martin's favorite waitress, Karie Kessler, had turned his table over to a stranger.

On Monday he had sat there, she said, ordering his customary "poached eggs, real soft, burnt toast, two jellies, hot coffee, extra ... napkins and 1½ glasses of orange juice."

Too sick and weak to talk, Martin had motioned to her with hand signals. He asked a friend to do the ordering. But despite his illnesses — Martin long had

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