

Theodore (Teddy) Trept

Mechanic

1927 to 1972

Jimmy Dean of Chance Vought Corporation hired Theodore (Teddy) Trept in 1927, then located on Long Island, New York. His starting salary was a whopping sixty cents an hour. Although the wages seemed enormous, there were no fringe benefits then; employees were paid only for hours worked-no vacation or sick days, and no medical insurance.

Teddy recalled most management as very supportive of the people who were not fluent in English. He had occasion to talk to Chance Milton Vought soon after arriving on the job, as he remembers this humorous encounter when he was searching a disorganized stock room for a piece of steel. Mr. Vought appeared and said in German, "Not so much noise". Teddy remembers thinking "The big boys speak German!" He learned later that, though Management was patient with them, they had little experience in communicating with their immigrant population. Chance Vought visited the work area almost every day.



Teddy remembers working with Pop Reichert during a time when Pop was frequently inventing new machines and processes for product improvement. John Cook assisted Reichert as mechanic in developing a machine to use in lubricating the fuselage, a project suggested by Chance Vought. Other Reichert inventions included a machine in which a fuel tank could be placed to vibrate; a flexible gun mount having two telescoping arms; the 360-degree tail wheel, and a lubricating gun.

Jimmy Dean promised to teach Teddy all about engines if Teddy would help him build an airplane, and work on boat motors. Chance Vought owned several large motor boats, which he raced. He loaned one of his boats to Teddy and Jimmy for their entertainment. In return, they kept his boats in top mechanical condition.

During this period, there was no separate experimental shop. The mechanics worked with steel tubing, and installed fittings during the design and development of these complex aircraft. The Dinosaur was a Government aircraft requiring a heat resistant nose cone and leading edge, which the company was contracted to develop and build. Graphite and zirconium oxide were used. A jet engine was mounted as part of the testing procedure, as witnessed by Russ Clark from Engineering. This design was successful; however, the contract was canceled.

After moving to Hartford into a new building, the Experimental Department came into being. Teddy once spilled oil on the oak floor around the drill press, resulting in a trip to a nearby service station to purchase gasoline to clean up the floor. At his retirement celebration, coworkers gave him the forty cents of his own money he spent on the gasoline.

Teddy worked on all models of aircraft produced by the Company from 1917 to 1972. The V-143 Aircraft was built in record time. The design was purchased from Northrop, and later sold to Japan.

The F4U Corsair was initiated in Hartford. Teddy was a Leadman in Experimental who found this program very interesting. This model's rings had a special "U" shape and were covered by fabric, another product of Pop Reichert's innovations. The wing was covered with a fabric band.

The unique V-173 Flying Pancake was initially designed by Charles H. Zimmerman around 1945 in Stratford, and was made from wood. John Lingel was involved in the structural portion of this aircraft.

Boone Guyton was also involved in the production of this circular-wing model having two 80 h.p. wing-tipped motors, laminated wood props, fabric-covered wing and twin tails. This aircraft was flown several times by Charles Lindbergh, who was intrigued by its design. This aircraft is currently stored at the National Air and Space Museum, Washington, D.C.

The XF5U was the metal version of the Flying Pancake; planned to be larger and more powerful than its predecessor. However, Navy funding cuts after WWII resulted in loss of the contract.

Coworkers like Herman Meiners, John Reiger, Mike Bilchak and Charlie McCarthy were making significant contributions during these early developments.

Teddy's job also included making models of these aircraft, thus helping to preserve the Company history.

Tedd's immigration to the United States in 1927

A company is only as good as its employees. Those companies originating on the East Coast during the early 20th century were blessed with a wealth of multinational talent, as well as a strong work ethic, resulting in solid workforce. People hungry for steady jobs streamed through Ellis Island from many different countries. Theodore Trept, a German immigrant formerly of Dresden, Germany, arrived in 1927 aboard the ship Columbus. He and others who had relatives already living in the U.S. were not required to go to Ellis Island to enter the country. His father, Johannes Alfred Trept, had obtained work in 1925 as a machinist at Chance Vought Corporation. John, as he came to be known in the United States, had worked and saved for two years to enable his son, Teddy, to come to the U.S. The fare for transport by ship was approximately \$250 for second-class travel. At that time, the senior Trept returned to Germany to sell his restaurant so that his wife and two daughters could join the family in America. After his dad left for Germany, Teddy bought a motorcycle, an Indian Chief. After one minor accident with this machine, he sent it to his dad in Germany to repay him for his ticket.

Immigrants desiring to obtain U.S. citizenship were given what was called "First Papers", which were valid for two years. John Trept was unaware that his papers were expiring during his time in Germany; therefore, when he returned to America, he was unable to work at Chance Vought once the citizenship issue arose. With the money obtained from the sale of his assets in Germany, he purchased a farm in Connecticut where he retired.

Teddy's mother, Agnes, learned to cook at the Castle of Pilnitz, on the shores of the Elbe River, where the King of Saxony stayed in the summer. She was one of the King's cooks whenever he visited the castle, located twenty miles outside of Dresden. The training she received there was a great benefit at the family's restaurant in Dresden. Teddy met the King on the last day of school where his class was touring the city by trolley car. A carriage drawn by four horses stopped at the trolley station. The King was sitting inside the carriage, and was very friendly to the students.

Though not fluent in English, Theodore (Teddy) had little trouble finding employment in 1927 due, in part, to his excellent education to become a qualified mechanic. He had attended liberal college for five years in Germany, where he had six years of Latin, four years of French, two years of Greek, and gymnastics, with a year and a half of practical experience as well. German applicants for jobs in America were particularly welcome, due to their extensive training. Four years after his marriage, Teddy studied English and aeronautical engineering at night, through an international correspondence school. Added to his formal training, Teddy was taught by his father to play the zither, a difficult instrument to master.

At the age of 26, Teddy married his sweetheart, Hildegard Weickert, whom he had been seeing for four years. Hildegard was born in Demarest, New Jersey and lived in Brooklyn, New York when they met. This was the beginning of a marriage that lasted fifty-nine years, ending when Hildegard passed away in 1993. During their early years, prior to their marriage, Hildegard worked at a knitting mill, then as receptionist and assistant for two dentists; later worked as an interpreter at Funk & Wagnalls Encyclopedia Company and at Schraffts Restaurant.

Hildegard's parents took her to Germany at age 3, to visit her grandparents. World War I broke out during their visit. They were stranded there because they had no citizenship papers with them. Her father was drafted into the German army and sent to the front in France. He finally obtained his papers, thereby convincing the authorities he was an American citizen. He returned to Germany, where his father bought a grocery store for him. Hildegard was educated in Germany. The family moved back to the U.S. in 1925, settling in Manhattan where she and Teddy met.

The Biergartens were the scene primarily of German and Austrian immigrants seeking entertainment after a long week of hard work building aircraft such as the O2U Corsair series, and later the XF2U-1, SB2U Vindicator, OS2U Kingfisher, and F4U Corsair. Other social activities enjoyed by company employees and their friends included gymnastics, singing societies, and dancing. This eclectic group was comprised of Norwegians, Swedes, and Dutch, as well as people of German descent. Chance Vought had moved to East Hartford, Conn. during this period. Teddy recounts that the German favorite of sauerkraut was called "liberty cabbage" during World War I.

Eleven years later, when the Company was in East Hartford, Conn., then in Stratford, Conn., Teddy's family, now with a young daughter, Heidi, lived in Manchester, Conn. After moving to Milford, Conn., the Trept family grew in May of 1945 with the birth of a son, Teddy, Jr. The economy had eroded by then, and the pay scale dropped to 35 cents per hour for mechanics. "Pop" Reichert was head of the Experimental Shop in which Teddy worked. They were a great team for many years, continuing together long after the Company's move to Grand Prairie, Texas, which began in 1948 and was completed in 1949. The Experimental Shop was very busy with the F4U, F6U and F7U series aircraft.

Music played a large part in the entertainment sought after by the German community. Dances such as the polkas, waltzes, and masquerade balls kept life from becoming humdrum. Singing festivals were popular then, as they are now, in Dallas, where the Sons of Hermann Hall is the site of much activity. This building has been a mecca for persons seeking companionship from fellow countrymen since it was built in 1910. It is now designated as a historic site, and is used by many people for varied purposes, even used as a movie filming location.

Teddy and his wife, Hildegard, were active in their role to improve German/American relations. The President of West Germany awarded the Cross of Merit to Teddy in 1987 for his contribution to improving German/American Relations. Also in 1987, Hildegard received a similar award from the American Embassy in Washington, D.C., through the Consul General in Houston for her

achievements toward the same goal. Hildegard was a member of the Ladies' Auxiliary, the Dallas Singing Society, and a volunteer at Central Methodist Hospital.

Mr. Trept enjoys the beautiful home he built in 1974, as well as his family members who live nearby and his many friends.

Teddy keeps busy now, continuing to entertain with his zither music, and singing with his friends in the Dallas area.

The stoic people who joined Chance Vought Corporation in its infancy surely helped to mold the Company into a strong, innovative division of what was then United Aircraft Corporation. Teddy Trept continued to lend his talents to the Company until his retirement in 1972, after completing forty-five years of dedicated service.