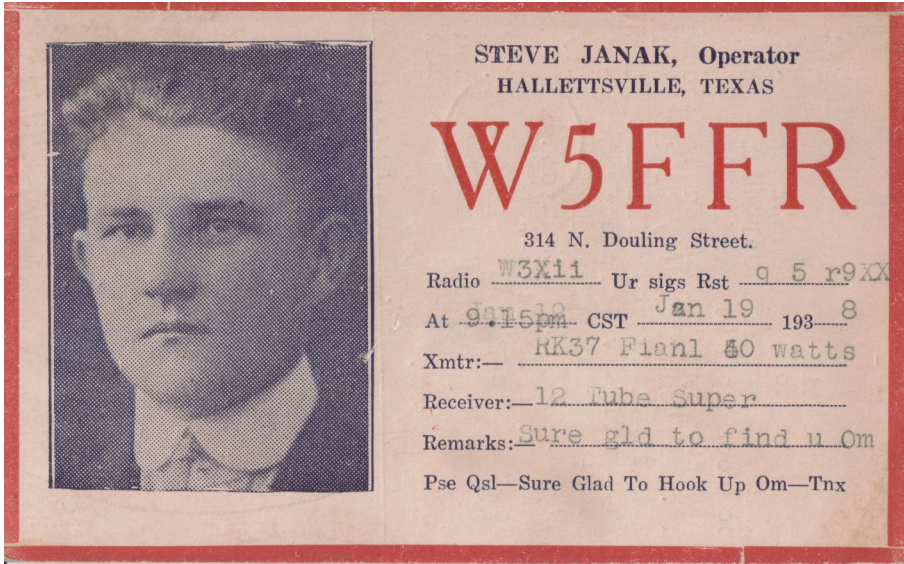




Steve Janak
Hallettsville’s Lone Aviator

By Brenda Lincke Fisseler



Around 5:30 almost every day, local citizens could spot Steven Janak flying his two cylinder Aeronca aircraft in the skies over Hallettsville and the surrounding area. Janak had purchased the plane with his friend Alfred Turk and had set up a private landing strip three miles north of Hallettsville.

Many people believe that Lavaca County’s fascination with flight began with Steve’s personal interest in planes. Janak, the son of Val and Aloisia Janak grew up in Wied, Texas. After attending electrician’s school in Chicago, ILL, he returned to Hallettsville and opened the Hallettsville Electric Company where he provided radio service and was a distributor for RCA Victor Radios.

Janak’s regular evening flights over the area soon earned him the nickname “Hallettsville's Lone Aviator”. Janak encouraged the interest of local citizens by arraigning for a government instructor to use his plan to give lessons to twelve interested people.

Note: The Aeronca C-2 was designed by Aeronautical Corporation of America for general aviation between 1919 and 1938. The C-2 was designed to be a cheap and simple flying machine. It’s relatively low price appealed to those private citizens could not afford airplanes. It was flying at its most basic, tiny two cylinder engines, a bare plywood board for a seat, equipped with only five instruments with an open pod fuselage that inspired its nickname “The Flying Bathtub”. The C2 was priced at a low \$1,495.00

“Great minds are related to
the brief span of time
during which they live
as great buildings are to a
little square in which they
stand...”

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By Brenda Lincke Fisseler

Plane Crash Kills Steve Janak

Steve Janak was in trouble. Just after 7:00 pm on Wednesday, August 20, many in the city heard his motor sputter and saw his plane losing altitude rapidly. To the alarmed public, it was evident that Janak was attempting to reach his landing field north of town near the home of Ed. Frieda. According to Mr. Frieda, when Janak neared the field, he circled the Frieda home, located by five hundred yards from the hanger, once. The plane barely missed the house and about thirty yards north of the house the right wing struck the ground and the plane nosed half-way over and fell back into regular position. Frieda told investigators that he could see Steve attempting to work the controls in the plane. The official civil aeronautics authority inspector from Houston stated the plane most likely crashed because it has lost its landing speed.

First to reach the scene was Mr. Frieda who stated the gasoline was running out of the tank, but the plane did not catch fire because Steve had cut off the ignition prior to impact.

The ambulance arrived at the scene and transported Steve to the Dufner Hospital but on arrival he was deceased. According to the inquest, his death was a result of a fracture at the base of his skull.

Funeral services were held on Saturday, August 23 at 7:30 am at his parents home and at St. Mary's Catholic Church at 8:00 am. Interment was in the St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery. After his funeral the local newspaper wrote of the huge attendance at Steve's funeral. The newspaper stated that nothing would serve as his epitaph more than his own words:

“When my plane goes down, I go down with it”



Sources:

The Tribune: 1933 February 7; 1937 December 10; 1938 October 14

Lavaca County Tribune: 1941 August 22; August 26

Shiner Gazette: 1941 August 28

<http://www.pilotfriend.com/aircraft%20performance/aeronca/aeronca.htm>

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Lavaca County Inquest Records

Corte, Elizabeth, Fallen Flyers: Lavaca County's Special Tribute 1999.