

## IN GOOD COMPANY

### Storied career of helicopter pioneer Frank Piasecki honored by the National Aviation Hall of Fame

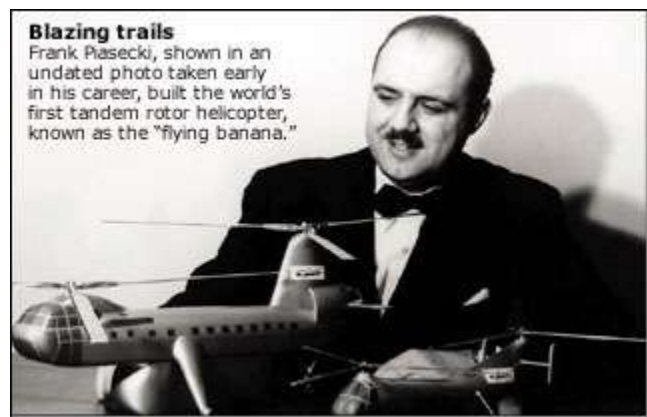
BY KATHLEEN HANSER

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If your name is going to be eternally linked with others, it's nice to be in good company, and this is definitely good company: Neil Armstrong, Charles Lindbergh, Wernher von Braun, Amelia Earhart, Chuck Yeager and the Wright Brothers.

They are just a few of the many illustrious aviation pioneers whom Frank Piasecki recently joined as a member of the National Aviation Hall of Fame.

Piasecki, a trailblazer in the development of helicopters, was born in 1919. He became fascinated at an early age with aviation technology, which at the time was an exciting new field.



**Blazing trails**

Frank Piasecki, shown in an undated photo taken early in his career, built the world's first tandem rotor helicopter, known as the "flying banana."

He studied aeronautical engineering at the University of Pennsylvania and the New York University Guggenheim School of Aeronautics, graduating in 1940. While still in college, he founded the P-V Engineering Forum with a classmate, Harold Venzie. In 1943, Piasecki's group designed the PV-2, a single-seat, single-rotor helicopter that became the second successful helicopter to fly in the United States.

Piasecki was the PV-2's first pilot, by happenstance. He was sitting in the aircraft while testing its systems when the tether broke and the helicopter became airborne. Despite having only fourteen hours of flight time in fixed-wing aircraft and no experience in helicopters, Piasecki managed to bring the aircraft to a safe landing. Soon thereafter, he became the first person in the United States to qualify for a helicopter pilot's license. Piasecki remained the chief test pilot for the PV-2, as well as chief engineer and company president.

To promote the PV-2, Piasecki participated in a short film called, "An Air Flivver in Every Garage." The film featured Piasecki landing the helicopter in locations such as a golf course and a gas station. He kept the PV-2 until 1965, when he donated it to the Smithsonian Institution, where it is still on exhibit.

Piasecki's efforts attracted the attention of a few private investors and most notably the U.S. Navy, which gave Piasecki a contract to design a large tandem rotor helicopter capable of carrying heavy loads. In 1945, the first tandem rotor helicopter, and the first helicopter designed for the U.S. Navy, emerged. It was popularly called the "Flying Banana."

Piasecki's company grew into the Piasecki Helicopter Corporation. In 1955, Piasecki departed Piasecki Helicopter and formed Piasecki Aircraft Corporation to concentrate on the development of advanced vertical takeoff and landing systems. Boeing acquired his former company in 1960 as its Helicopter Division.



Two Chinook CH-47s in action in the war against terrorism in Afghanistan. The Chinook evolved from Piasecki's ground-breaking tandem rotor designs of the 1940s and 1950s.

Piasecki holds more than 20 patents, and the list of his awards, honors and memberships goes on for pages. They include Fellow of the Institute of Aeronautical Sciences, Honorary Fellow of the American Helicopter Society, recipient of Helicopter Foundation International's Heritage Hall of Fame Award, and donor of the Dr. Alexander Klemin Award, given annually by the American Helicopter Society for outstanding work in rotary-wing aeronautics.

In 1986, Piasecki was further honored when President Reagan awarded him The National Medal of Technology, a most fitting tribute to one of America's true pioneers.

Piasecki, now 82, still goes to work every day at Piasecki Aircraft Corp. in Essington, Pa., which he runs with two of his five sons. Recently, the company was awarded a \$26.1 million U.S. Navy contract for the design and prototype flight test of a compound helicopter.

Boeing Rotorcraft continues to honor Piasecki and another helicopter inventor, Howard Hughes, through its "Frank and Howard Forum." The Forum is a management development program focusing on a broad range of business concepts and interpersonal skills.

"We want our employees to carry on the proud tradition of Piasecki and Hughes," said Roger Krone, Boeing vice president and former general manager of Boeing Army Programs/Rotorcraft, who established the Forum. "The Forum is designed to help employees grow in their entrepreneurial spirit and bring rotorcraft into the 21st century."

Meanwhile, Piasecki's daughter, Nicole, is vice president of marketing for Boeing Commercial Airplanes. While her professional focus has been in the areas of sales and marketing, Nicole also studied mechanical engineering and, like her father, is a pilot.

Dismissing any comparison with her father, Nicole said, "My father had the talents required to both conceive and lead the engineering and development of projects like the tandem-rotor helicopter long before useful computers were even available."

That, she said, reflects both the can-do attitude of his Polish-immigrant parents and Frank's unique genius. "For me, as a child, he wasn't the easiest father to have, given the unwavering focus and discipline which he instilled in all seven of his children, whether working in the family business on Saturdays or in the yard on Sundays—or learning Polish dances when he came home from work in the evening," said Nicole. "These are only some aspects of why he is a great dad. He is also an inspiration for generations of Americans."

The National Aviation Hall of Fame, located at the U.S. Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio, enshrines individuals for their achievements and lifelong contributions to aviation. It has a Learning and Research Center that displays information on its members and the history of flight.

The Hall of Fame has approximately 174 members, including Boeing's own pioneers of aviation, William Boeing, J.S. McDonnell and Donald Douglas.

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