



# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of E. ELLWOOD "RED" PHILLIPS



February 18, 1913 - December 18, 1991

Compiled by WP (12/2013); reformatted by JS (12/2013)

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*The following was compiled and edited by Wynn Paul in December of 2013 and submitted to the AMA History Project (at the time called the AMA History Program).*

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E. Ellwood "Red" Phillips was the originator of the E-Z JUST control line handle that was the most popular handle with stunt fliers from the late 1940s to the 1980s.

Red was born February 18, 1913 in Ohio. He married Mary C. Overmoyer (July 2, 1914 - April 10, 2008) of Williamsfield, Ohio in 1936. Mary taught school in Wayne Central and Rock Creek, Ohio. Red and Mary moved to Buffalo, New York. Red worked for the Curtiss Aircraft Company in Buffalo.

A friend asked Red to design a control line handle for him. This was probably sometime early in 1946. Red cut one out of wood and included a wire to hook the control lines to the handle. The exciting innovation by Red was that the one piece of stranded wire which looped around the back side of the handle was adjustable to assist in making the flying lines equal. The stainless steel wire was 0.0625 inches thick. There was a small metal retaining/adjustable tab inserted in the backside of the handle that the wire passed through and this allowed the wire to be moved, adjusting the lengths of handle wires. And it required no tools to adjust the length of the leadout wire.

According to De Hill of Tulsa, Oklahoma, who owns a couple of the wood handles, in a 2013 email he pointed out that the wood handles did not have the ends of the wire looped. The pilot had to finish the loops and solder them.

Red decided to start producing the wood handles and teamed up with Gordon Greeley. They named the business Phil-Leys, a contraction of their two names. They operated out of Williamsville, New York, a suburb of Buffalo. They sought the market for speed and stunt fliers.

There was an advertisement in the November 1946 issue of *Air Trails* model airplane magazine for the handle, which they named "E-Z JUST" as the handle wire was adjustable to lengthen or shorten the up and down flying lines.

According to an interview by David Gierke of Lancaster, New York, in 1989, Red stated that he tested every handle by hanging from the handle which was suspended from the ceiling joists in his basement. At the time, Red weighed around 150 pounds, so it was a good test of the strength of the handle wire.

The early handles, still made of wood, were advertised at 69 cents each. Red stated that he made about 37 cents from each handle.

Red bought out Gordon Greeley after the first year of production.

In the July 1949 issue of *Air Trails*, the Phil-Leys advertisement stated that the E-Z JUST handle was now made of plastic and there were two sizes. The original larger handle had a line spacing of 5 inches. A new smaller handle known as the "Hot Rock" had a line spacing of 3 15/16 inches. Both handles were red in color. The red plastic handles had loops at the ends of the wire that were swaged. Later, handles were also available in a gray color. The cost of the handles in 1949 was 85 cents. The advertisement also listed the E-Z JUST Test and Break-in Stand for engines at \$1.25.

Red attended the 1949 National Model Airplane Championships in Olathe, Kansas, held in late July, and handed out several of the new plastic handles to Speed and Stunt event fliers. The handle with the adjustable wire to assist in trimming of the airplane soon became extremely popular with the fliers, especially the stunt pilots.

In the 1989 interview, Red stated that he produced over a million handles.

Sometime in the early 1970s, the E-Z JUST handles were manufactured in a gray color. Randy Smith of Aero Products is of the opinion that the gray may have been a stock color for the plastic moldings, and thus was cheaper than the red plastic. De Hill is of the opinion that the gray handles came out as a result of the law suit and they had a sticker on them warning of flying near power lines. The red handles did not have the warning sticker.

Unfortunately, there was a law suit in the 1970s against Phil-Leys (handle) and Sullivan Products (flying lines) by the family of a flier who was electrocuted when his flying wires wrapped around a high voltage line. The judgment on this law suit eventually put Red Phillips out of business.

E. Ellwood "Red" Phillips died on December 18, 1991 in Roswell, Chaves County, New Mexico. Mary died on April 10, 2008 in Wheatfield, New York. They had two sons: Charles Phillips of Petaluma, California and Robert of Grand Island, New York.

The E-Z JUST control handles and the E-Z JUST Hot Rock handles were the most popular control line handles from the late 1940s to the 1980s.

### **Bibliography, first edition, December 3, 2013**

- Telephone interview with David Gierke, Lancaster, New York, December 3, 2013
- Advertisement, E-Z Just handle, "Phil-Leys", Williamsville, New York, *Air Trails*, November, 1946, p. 110
- Advertisement, E-Z Just handle, Handle made of wood, *Air Trails*, December, 1946, p. 120
- Advertisement for red plastic handles, also introduction of the "Hot Rock" smaller handle, *Air Trails*, July, 1949, p. 86

- Obituary - Mary Overmoyer Phillips, Star Beacon Newspaper, Ashtabula, Ohio, May 3, 2008 (This Obituary was found by Bill Lawrence, a friend of Wynn Paul, on December 3, 2013)

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