

= Elvy Kalep =

Alviine @-@ Johanna Kalep (26 June 1899 ? 15 August 1989) , known as Elvy Kalep , was an Estonian aviator and the country 's first female pilot , as well as an artist , toy designer and a one @-@ time children 's author .

Kalep grew up in Estonia and Russia , and subsequently moved to China to escape the Russian Civil War . She worked briefly as an interpreter for military officials in China before settling in Paris to study art with Alexandre Jacovleff . In 1931 , she qualified as a pilot in Germany , becoming the first Estonian female pilot . Befriending American aviatrix Amelia Earhart , she joined the Ninety @-@ Nines and took up the cause of encouraging other women to take up aviation . She wrote and illustrated a children 's book about flying , Air Babies , which was first published in 1936 .

After settling in the United States , Kalep founded a toy manufacturing business in New York . Although she was forced to close the business in 1946 due to her poor health , she made a living through the 1950s by selling patents to toy designs to larger businesses . In later decades , she created artworks out of leather , which she exhibited across the United States . She died in Florida in 1989 .

= = Early life = =

Kalep was born on 26 June 1899 in the village of Taali in Tori Parish , Pärnu County . She was the only child of Joanna (née Liidemann) and locksmith Aksel Emil , who both died when she was a young girl . She attended Tallinna Tütarlaste Kommertsgümnaasium , a girls ' secondary school in Tallinn . As a teenager , Kalep moved to Russia to live with an aunt in Saint Petersburg . She witnessed the events that sparked the February Revolution in 1917 , and spent a night in police detention as an eyewitness . She made a failed attempt to flee at the outset of the revolution , during which time she witnessed six men being shot while waiting in line to buy train tickets out of the country . She and her aunt moved to Vladivostok , where she married a Russian general , Count Slast'ov , and had a son . She lived in Vladivostok for eight years , during which time she made numerous escape efforts , before her new family was able to successfully flee to China , a refuge they chose because of Slast'ov 's ties to Zhang Zuolin .

Within a year of arriving in Harbin , China , Kalep 's son died and her husband disappeared . Kalep was able to support herself by working as an interpreter ? she spoke Russian , German , English and Chinese ? for a British general in Shenyang . She was also employed by Zhang Zuolin and later his son , Zhang Xueliang , but decided to return to Estonia in 1925 . She traveled through Indonesia , Italy and France before eventually arriving in Tallinn in 1926 . Soon afterwards she settled in Paris , where she studied the art of oil painting with Russian painter Alexandre Jacovleff . She married Rolf Baron von Hoeningen @-@ Bergendorff , who was of German or Austrian descent .

= = Aviation career = =

Kalep took up flying in the late 1920s , when she met Dutch aviator Anthony Fokker while holidaying in St. Moritz and asked him to teach her to fly a plane . She completed five hours of flying with Fokker and , after breaking her arm during a sledding accident in the winter of 1931 , took her pilot 's test in Germany on 1 August 1931 . She passed , becoming the first qualified female pilot from Estonia , and the seventh woman to pass the exam in Germany . Soon after receiving her license , Kalep and Valter Mayer , a German mechanic , co @-@ piloted a small Klemm plane from Berlin through Eastern Europe , stopping in Szczecin , Gdańsk , Kaunas , Jelgava and Riga , finally landing in Tallinn on 18 August . Upon her arrival in Tallinn , Kalep was greeted by a crowd of journalists and officers of the Estonian Air Force ; she briefly visited relatives in Nõmme before beginning her return journey to Amsterdam .

In May 1932 , Kalep traveled from France to New York on the steamship SS Paris with the intention of flying back to Europe across the Atlantic Ocean ; at the time , no woman had made a solo transatlantic flight . She befriended American aviation pioneer Amelia Earhart , who , unbeknownst

to Kalep , was planning a similar feat . After Earhart 's successful flight from Canada to Ireland on 20 May , Kalep decided that it would not be worthwhile to make her own attempt at flying across the Atlantic , since she would no longer be the first woman to do so . She continued to encourage other women to enter the field of aviation , however , and became a member of the Ninety @-@ Nines , an international organisation for women pilots which was founded by Earhart and 98 other female aviators . In August 1932 , Kalep planned to fly with Roger Q. Williams from Los Angeles to Athens to celebrate the former city 's hosting of the 1932 Summer Olympics , but their flight was canceled . Soon after , it was reported that Kalep had remarried to W. E. Hutton @-@ Miller , an American stockbroker .

In 1936 , Kalep published the first edition of Air Babies , a children 's book that she wrote and illustrated to teach children about flying . The story followed two young planes , Happy Wings and Speedy , and a 1938 reprint included a foreword from Earhart , who embarked on her last flight three days after writing the piece ; she disappeared while flying in 1937 . Kalep later said of Earhart 's disappearance : " I miss her very much . When I heard that Amelia had disappeared , well , I fell apart . " She visited the 1939 New York World 's Fair to promote Air Babies on television and to speak at the National Woman 's Party luncheon .

= = Art and design career = =

After the outbreak of World War II in 1939 , and with the dissolution of her third marriage , Kalep began a new business venture in the American toy market . She designed a doll named Patsie Parachute which , when thrown into the air , would fall down slowly as a parachutist would . The dolls were produced in a New York factory where Kalep herself was forced to work to sustain the business . Her health deteriorated , however , and her profits from the business were spent almost entirely on medical costs ; she was forced to close the factory in 1946 . She had recovered by 1950 and made a living by selling patents for toy designs to larger businesses . One of her successful designs was Scribbles Dolls ? toy dolls with blank faces that could be individually decorated by children ? which was inspired by the 50 @,@ 000 doll heads she had left over from the closure of the Patsie Parachute factory .

In the 1960s , while living in Palm Beach , Florida , Kalep began creating leather artworks which she sold to her neighbours to make a living . She created three @-@ dimensional paintings made out of small pieces of coloured leather imported from France . Throughout the 1970s she showcased her art in exhibitions across the United States and sold works to high @-@ profile customers including Eugene Ormandy .

= = Death = =

Kalep died on 15 August 1989 , aged 90 , in the Regency Health Care Center of Lake Worth , Florida . She had lived in the facility since 1986 . She had been married three times but had no surviving family at the time of her death . Obituaries for Kalep were published in the Florida newspaper the Sun @-@ Sentinel and Vaba Eesti Sõna , an Estonian @-@ language newspaper published in New York .