

## Ted Hartley '46

Ted Hartley was born and raised an Iowa farm boy, but his dreams were far from the farm. At age 14, he entered and won an essay contest sponsored by Warner Brothers. His prize-winning, 50-word essay, "Why I Would Like to Fly," earned him flying lessons.

Hartley attended Shattuck Military School in Minnesota, and at age 16, was appointed to the Naval Academy, hoping to pursue his love of aviation.



Photo courtesy of RKO Pictures, Inc.

While at Annapolis, he was involved with a variety of activities ranging from being editor-in-chief of *The Log*, a member of the Class Policy Committee, co-designer of the Academy Christmas card and commander of the Academy yawl Alert. He was on the wrestling team and was a U.S. Olympic finalist in that sport.

As a commissioned officer, Hartley had

Together with his wife, Hartley bought 51% of RKO with the promise of bringing the studio back to the success of its heyday when they had released movies such as *Citizen Kane*, *King Kong*, *Suspicion* and *It's a Wonderful Life*. The deal went through in 1991 and the studio became RKO Pictures Inc., with Hartley as chairman and Merrill as vice chairman.

Both Hartley and Merrill held great respect for the past glory of RKO and began a several-year inventory of their library holdings. Ted Turner held the U.S. distribution rights for film and television—RKO still controlled actual copyright over the film library and all the archival holdings, giving them the right to refilm its old material and to use unproduced scripts. The material included more than 1,100 previously produced films and 900 unproduced stories and screenplays by Orson Welles, Ring Lardner, Ben Hecht and other famous writers.

Hartley restructured RKO into five divisions:

RKO's Producer's Circle for high-budget films to be done in association with other major studios. The first of these projects, *Mighty Joe Young* (a remake of the 1949 film), was co-produced with Disney.

tours as a congressional liaison for the Pentagon, as a Presidential aide, and as a carrier-based pilot. But in May 1964, Ted Hartley's promising Navy career ended when his F9F8 fighter jet crashed on the deck of Hornet. Thrown from the plane, Hartley suffered a broken back and was medically retired from the Navy.

Ted Hartley took what most people would consider a big disappointment and turned it into an opportunity. He graduated from Harvard Business School and pursued a career in investment banking. He worked his way up to vice president in First Western Financial Corporation, but was fired over his strong objection to a program his boss was promoting.

Once again, Hartley bounced back, seeing this "transition" as an opportunity to pursue another of his boyhood dreams, acting. He appeared on the successful television show, *Peyton Place*, playing the character of the Reverend Jerry Bedford. He also had roles in several movies with Cary Grant, Robert Redford, Clint Eastwood and others before landing his own TV series in the late 1970s called *Chopper One*. The show eventually was cancelled and he again found new opportunities.

He left Hollywood for Aspen, Colorado, where he became the managing artistic director of a local theatre. He was involved with all aspects of operations and enjoyed a successful winter season. But when the snow leaves, so do the crowds, so Hartley

Radio Pictures Group for lower budget films such as *Ritual* (2000), *Milk and Money* (1996) distributed by Miramax/Dimension and other independent film companies.

RKO Pictures Television to utilize franchise elements already in place in RKO's library for TV movies, mini-series, situation comedies and drama series for network and Cable such as *Holiday Affair* (Christmas 1996).

RKO Entertainment for Broadway productions, themed restaurants and other entertainment outlets and the company's internet and children's film groups.

RKO International for overseas distribution sales.

They say that everything old is new again. An unproduced film by Orson Welles, *The Way to Santiago*, was discovered among the archives, and is under development for future production and the company has just completed the new version of Welles' original film of *The Magnificent Ambersons* based on the 1918 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Booth Tarkington about a stubborn man who loses his fortune because of his unwillingness to embrace the age of the automobile. Originally cut short by almost an hour in its disappointing 1942 release, the new RKO version is a four-hour television miniseries faithful to Welles' original script which will be broadcast in summer 2001 on A & E.

returned to investment banking.

Hartley was a partner in Pavilion Communications Inc.—a company that bought out or re-financed smaller entertainment companies. When RKO came to his attention in 1990, Hartley looked for a way to re-build the company. A former giant in the industry, RKO had been in decline since Howard Hughes took over in 1948, slowing production and gradually changing the emphasis from film to television and radio programming. Under new ownership in the 1980s, RKO had experienced a resurgence and once again became active in film production. The majority stockholders in the 1980s were U. S. Secretary of the Treasury, William F. Simon and Ray Chambers.

In 1989, decades after they had first been introduced by her mother, Hartley married actress Dina Merrill (*Butterfield 8*, *Operation Petticoat*), daughter of New York financier E.F. Hutton.

Just completed is a remake of 1943's *I Walked With a Zombie* (to be released as *Ritual*). Also planned are a remake of 1947's *Desperate* and 1948's *Fort Apache*. On Broadway, stage versions of *Swing Time* and *Top Hat*, which starred Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, and *Citizen Kane* are underway.

Not only are Ted Hartley and Dina Merrill the heads of RKO, they also support philanthropic activities including the Hartley-Merrill Prize for Screenwriting to perpetuate the art of storytelling. They founded the Story Project® to promote literacy among inner-city youth, beginning in the Santa Monica Boys and Girls Club. So Ted Hartley continues to make opportunity where he finds it, and makes childhood dreams come true.

\*RKO Academy Award nominate/winning pictures include: *The Bells of St. Mary's*; *The Best Years of Our Life*; *Bringing Up Baby*; *The Fugitive*; *King Kong*; *Suspicion*; *Notorious*; *The Little Foxes*; *Top Hat* among others.

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