



OX5 NEWS

Published by and for Members of the OX5 Aviation Pioneers®

VOLUME 38 – NUMBER 2

APRIL 1996



W. DILLARD "PIC" WALKER

WDILLARD "PIC" WALKER, was born November 26, 1911 in LaSalle, Colorado. Walker, barely a teenager, first went aloft in a long winged OX5 powered Alexander Eaglerock in 1924.

In the 1930's, Walker was a young and talented pilot operating Plains Airways with a brother. Plains began as a small charter company and airport service center, in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Walker flew numerous notable aircraft of the era. OX5 and Hisso powered Eaglerocks, a Rearwin, the Axelson powered Travelaire 2000 his brother Jack owned, Wacos, Stinsons, Aeroncas, and Taylorcrafts to name a few.

From bi-planes to the space age Walker enjoyed a birds-eye-view. In 1938 Walker took his new bride on their wedding trip in a 37 horsepower Taylorcraft that, occasionally, flew faster backwards than it did forward in the winds of Wyoming. His bride, Frances, became the first female to learn to fly in Wyoming.

In the months prior to Pearl Harbor, Walker joined former New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and aviation writer Gill Robb Wilson in laying plans for the protection to the United States homeland.

This effort was made following President Roosevelt's directing Mayor LaGuardia to organize the largest private strategic air force in the free world. This small group of men soon grew to 48 wing commanders and now numbers close to 60,000 members across the United States. Major Walker was the first wing commander in Wyoming and the Rocky Mountain Region.

In 1991, in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Civil Air Patrol, the United States Air Force official auxiliary presented Major W. Dillard Walker with a special award as the sole surviving Charter Wing Commander in the CAP. General Warren J. Barry made the presentation in a beautiful ceremony at the foot of the panoramic Teton Mountain Range near Jackson's Hole, Wyoming. Colonel Smith, of the Rocky Mountain Region, presented Walker with a special plaque commemorating his pioneering status with the CAP. At the Arizona Wing's 50th anniversary Saturday, July 4, 1992 Walker re-

ceived similar accolades as the special guest of honor. The Arizona Wing was formed in 1942 a year after the CAP's inception. Recently, he was promoted to Colonel posthumously, the first time that has been known to have been done.

On November 10, 1992, Walker traveled to Washington, D.C., where he was honored by The National Aeronautic Association as "Elder Statesman of Aviation." During this time he was the first pioneer aviator to be profiled by the "Arizona Flyways" magazine. Aviation Archives interviewed both Pic and Frances Walker for over 6 hours March 10, 1993, just three weeks prior to his

"last flight."

Pic Walker was the first person selected to be honored by the Wyoming Aviation Hall of Fame and was inducted August 11, 1995 in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Along with Walker and his long time friend, Captain Ralph S. Johnson, was Captain Harold T. "Slim" Lewis, and General Sam Phillips. Phillips had learned to fly in Walker's flight school during WWII.

During WWII, Walker was responsible for directing search and rescue operations, handling important courier services for the Air Corps, aerial surveys and a myriad of other tasks assigned him to relieve the Army Air Corps pilots.

Some of the search and rescue operations were covered by the national press corps.

During WWII, Walker's small charter operation grew to three major CPT (Civilian Pilot Training) facilities located in Cheyenne and Laramie, Wyoming and a glider training facility in Ft. Morgan, Colorado.

Walker's CPT program trained more than 5000 Air Corps pilots for the Army and pumped over 14,000,000 gallons of aviation fuel into transient Air Corps aircraft. Many of Walker's own students went on to colorful aviation careers themselves. Many became airline pilots with several notable airlines such as Western, United, TWA, Mexicana, and Frontier.

Walker, while quick to credit others involved in the fledgling CAP and CPT programs, was a true pioneer and worked tirelessly in developing procedures and innovative instructional techniques to improve aviation safety. Many of Walker's innovations are still in use today.

The first Beech dealer west of the Mississippi, Walker's Plains Airways operated a large fleet of aircraft including Waco UPP's, Waco YKS, Waco E, SR-8 and SR-9 Stinsons, more than 30 Luscombe 8-A's, Beech Staggerwing, early model 18's and many aircraft owned by the Army Air Corps. His CPT programs also operated, on a smaller scale, at several other airfields in Wyoming. These were non college programs. The CPT college program was operated through the University of Wyoming in Laramie. Walker was named "Professor of Aeronautics" by the University of Wyoming. He worked with WWI great Boots LeBoutillier and Harold Grandy of the CAA in establishing safety guidelines many of which are enforced by the FAA even today.

Walker, along with a non flying brother, had

their hands full in supporting the war effort. Cheyenne was a major trans-continental stopping point for Army Air Corps aircraft and was home to a major modification center for B-17's and other aircraft. Plains Airways was a significant player to the Air Corps needs.

Following WWII, Walker became involved in agriculture aviation and developed many innovations in the dispersal of insecticides from large aircraft. Armed with BLM contracts Walker's modified DC-3 and Twin Beech aircraft were used to eradicate the grasshopper infestation in the Rocky Mountain area. Walker was honored by the Department of Agriculture as the most efficient pilot with the highest kill ratio during this program.

Along with longtime friend Ralph Johnson, Walker started Plains Aerial Surveys as another enterprise following WWII. Using a DC-3 they trailed a magnetic device they called "the bomb" behind the aircraft from its stow point underneath the fuselage. Later, Johnson mounted the device permanently to the wing. Following dive tests this modification was approved and they operated this system for a couple of years. They discovered the vast oil aquifer south of Cheyenne.

Other surplus DC-3's were modified and sold to corporate and airline operators. One DC-3 became Fram Oil Company's flagship. Later this aircraft was operated by Aspen Airways out of Denver. Three DC-3's were sold to Arizona Airways, and airline started by Barry Goldwater and others, that later was merged with Monarch and Challenger to become Frontier Airlines.

Following the sale of the aviation enterprise, Walker moved to Saratoga, Wyoming in 1950 where the Walker brothers ranched and built a beautiful resort known as The Saratoga Inn. Pic Walker built, almost single handedly, the first all grass golf course in Wyoming. The city of Saratoga honored Pic Walker by naming the street in front of The Saratoga Inn after him.

The immense single span bridge crossing the Platte River was dedicated to Pic Walker in a ceremony a few years ago. Walker had done the impossible and moved the bridge from its moors near the Snowy Range Road 18 miles away. Walker used his D-8 Caterpillar dozer and some oil field equipment to move the bridge. Townsfolk remarked at the time that of Pic could fly anything, even that big bridge.

Flying still played a big part in those days. At first Walker used a Luscombe T-8F with a Sorenson tank to fight the terrible Platte River mosquito. The T-8F was later replaced by a 1953 Cessna 180. Walker helped make the initial improvements to Shively field so that larger aircraft could land there. It is now a well known corporate jet port.

Following a move to Arizona in 1958, Walker utilized aircraft in conjunction with the real estate business until retirement in the mid '70s. Following many years as an active OX5er, Walker lined up on Runway 27 for his final flight March 31, 1993.