

## SOME RANDOM THOUGHTS

Memories, Mentors and Friends

Part 1

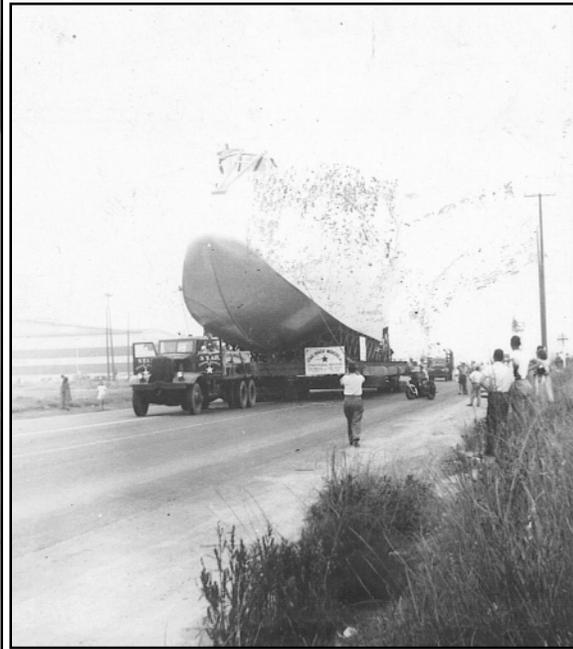
By

Robert G.Lock

I've written many articles for publishing concerning various subjects pertaining to antique airplanes. Now it may be time to just cut loose with some random thoughts about how I learned all this stuff about restoring, maintaining and flying these vintage airplanes.

I have just received the Charles Taylor Master Mechanic award, which signifies 50 years in aircraft maintenance. I was born in 1939 and remember blackouts in the Los Angeles area during the war. Also the fireside chats by President Roosevelt although recalling exactly what he said is not possible. I was fortunate to see the first and only flight of the Hughes Flying Boat, first flight of the Northrop XB-35 Flying Wing and can remember seeing the YB-49 Flying Wing in flight over the L.A basin.

These next two photos were taken by my father, Leonard. The ship was being moved from Culver City to Terminal Island in the Long Beach harbor. This is the hull on moving platform. My father wrote, "Rear step and cradle" on back of photo.



The photo to right is damaged and not replaceable. My father wrote on the back of this photo, "Compare fuselage with truck." From these photos one can tell how close we were to this gigantic airplane as it moved slowly to the harbor.



The following Hughes photos are mine, taken the day before and the day of the move. To the left, the Hughes cantilever hangar that housed the ship all these years. Note that walls and roof metal have been removed and discarded anywhere there was room. My brother Steve and I drove around until we came upon an area just

across the water channel from the airplane.

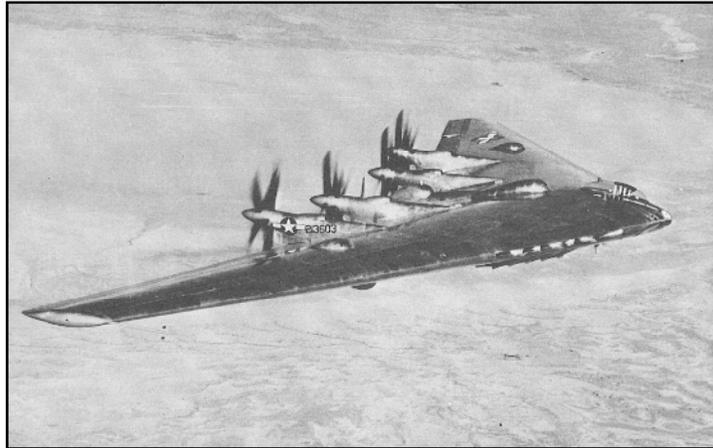
Right, the seawalls were pulled out by tugboats and as the tide came in the ship finally floated. It was immediately pulled from the hangar into the bay directly in front of the hangar. This was the first sunlight the ship had seen since it went into Hughes' new hangar. The date is October 29, 1980



Free at last, the Hughes H-4 floats just outside the hangar. Behind the ship is the Vincent Thomas Bridge that connects Terminal Island to the mainland. Unfortunately, Terminal Island has sunk somewhat over the years and the fin hit the top of hangar doing some damage to the

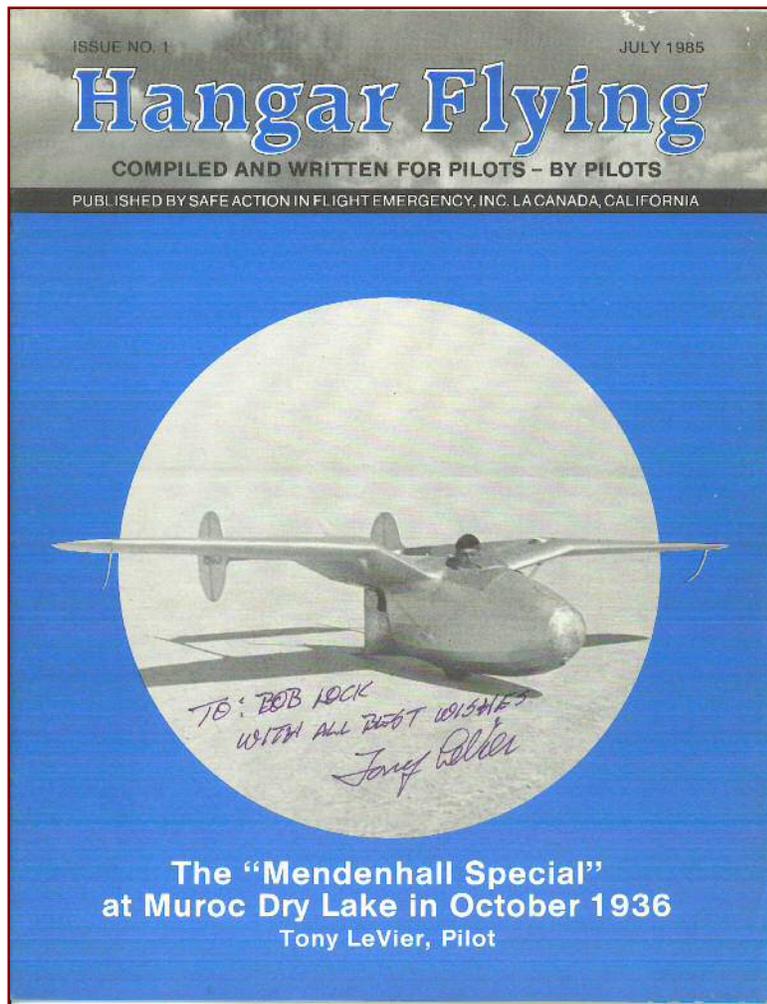
structure. I now am in possession of a small piece of spruce and grade A fabric from the original structure that I saw fly on November 2, 1947.

June 25, 1946 I saw the initial test flight of the Northrop XB-35 from Hawthorne Field. My uncle Earl Lock was attending Northrop to get training in Aeronautical Engineering, so he knew from the “inside” when the first flight was scheduled. He took me over to the field and we parked on Crenshaw Blvd and waited. The factory had blocked traffic and opened the fence on the East end of the runway. Across the road was a paved parking lot and East of that was a large potato field which bordered the Western Avenue golf course. In case of an emergency on take off pilot Max Stanley would have one mile of open ground in which



to land. The airplane roared by, powered by 4-Pratt Whitney R-4360 engines with counter-rotating propellers. It flew straight out to the East, then turned and headed for Muroc Dry Lake on the Mojave Desert. I met Max Stanley when attending an SAE Aerospace Conference in Long Beach many years later. The SAE had assembled a distinguished panel of test pilots, engineers and other well-known people connected with the history of aviation. After the session ended I went up to meet Mr. Stanley and told him I had witnessed the first flight from Hawthorne Field. He told me a story about that flight; it went something like this, “I was not scheduled to make the first flight, John Meyers was supposed to do it. But John was in the hospital recovering from a broken back suffered when the XP-56 he was testing crashed in September 1943. I reluctantly accepted the first flight duty and the day I flew the XB-35 I remember the airplane positioned at the far West end of the runway. I completed the run-up and slowly opened the throttles. A jack rabbit ran in front of the airplane from a clump of brush next to the runway and for the longest time the airplane was not gaining on the rabbit. I thought at that instant the airplane may never gain enough speed to fly, but eventually the rabbit darted off the runway and the airplane finally got airborne.”

I’ve been fortunate to have met many famous people associated with aviation. At that same event I met famous Lockheed test pilot Tony LeVier. He was full of funny stories. Tony was credited with discovering Groom Lake, which evolved into Area 51. He was so full of stories that when he started no one knew when he would finish! I saw him again in Fresno at a banquet sometime later.



Here is one of Tony's stories regarding the little airplane on cover page of "Hangar Flying." "The Mendenhall Special was designed and built by Gene Mendenhall in 1936 for the purpose of sport flying and air racing. It featured several unique designs for the period; a pusher propeller with a 26 hp cycle plane engine imbedded in the wing center section. Because of its torque, the little craft required someone to run alongside to hold its left wing on take-off. Otherwise it was impossible to keep the plane straight, due to a flopping motion from side-to-side caused by the little wing skids dragging on the ground. Each of its three flights lasted but 60 seconds due to magneto failure. Two of these flights were made at Rosamond dry lake, the sister dry lake to

Muroc. The third flight, out of Telegraph and Atlantic Airport East of Los Angeles resulted in a forced landing and crash because the carburetor fell off due to vibration. I was unhurt. The remains of the plane was used for static load tests which proved it to be good for approximately 9 G's."

It seems like just yesterday that I started a career in aviation. Although my first choice was to be an ag pilot flying biplanes, I never reached that goal. I had decided in order for a low time pilot to get a seat in a 450 Stearman, a mechanic certificate would help. So I went to Northrop Institute of Technology in Inglewood, California and was certificated as an A&P in 1961. But when I started doing maintenance, repairs and restoration on the venerable old Stearman, my mechanic skills became worth more to an employer than my piloting skills. So there was never an offer of a flying seat, rather I heard the words "we need you more to keep these airplanes flying." And the rest I'll tell some other time.

I learned early in my career as a mechanic that weight and balance and rigging played a huge part in how well an airplane flew. I learned how to rig the Stearman and compute empty weight center of gravity and loaded center of gravity. I applied the concept of rigging the Stearman to all other biplanes I restored. Rigging and rigging adjustments became second nature to me and I was never afraid to rig anything that flew. Although I confess to having never rigged an airplane with a hydraulic flight control system. I got close with the Bell 206B3 Jet Ranger, but I never rigged a flyable aircraft.

I taught fixed and rotary wing assembly and rigging (among many other subjects) while instructing at Reedley College from 1967 to 1998. This gave me the opportunity to research assembly and rigging and explain to students to a great depth. If a person studies theory of flight to a great depth, then rigging is very easy to comprehend. There are many good books concerning theory of flight, but the one I used primarily was "Aerodynamics for Naval Aviators." It covered subsonic, transonic and supersonic flight and aircraft stability in great detail and contained many excellent drawings that I adapted to the classroom.

One of my specialties was wood structural fabrication and repair. I learned techniques from an old master that had a shop near Corcoran, California. His name was Elmer Ruzicka and in his prime he was really good. He taught me many of the skills I still use today. I have always been in the restoration business and took 35mm slide photographs of many of my projects. I still have trays and trays of these slides showing spar splices, rib fabrication and repair, laminated wingbow fabrication, wing tramping, plywood leading edge installation, etc. I'm thinking of transferring these to DVD, but then I think why would I go to the expense to do all this. Some time ago I thought I might try to assemble some "artificial intelligence" programs, but it is very time consuming and I'm not sure I have the expertise. When I restored my Command-Aire biplane I took photos of almost the entire process. All that stuff is around here somewhere, probably stored in all those boxes piled in my shop. I have collected a lot of stuff over the past 50 years!

Again, my time at Reedley College allowed a unique opportunity to experiment with all the covering processes, including some that have been withdrawn from the commercial market. I remember when the Ceconite process came out in the late 1950's, followed by several others through the 1960's and 1970's. I have finished fabric with everything from pigmented dope, synthetic enamel, acrylic enamel and polyurethane enamel. I was never enamored with some of the synthetic processes that, if ignited, would readily burn. But all synthetic processes have their good and bad traits. A person just has to figure out what the final outcome of the finish needs to be – very high gloss or semi-gloss like the old dope process. Sometimes it's hard to convince a judge "that's the way it looked when it left the factory in 1929." It's usually the high gloss finishes that command attention and win prizes.

Another specialty was welding and I thought I was a good welder – until the first time I tried to make a welded repair on an airplane. The year was 1966 and the airplane was a large Snow S2C ag airplane. My welds were not good so my friends Bill Stranahan and Clarence Lewis came to my rescue and taught me the fine art of welding. They both worked at the Hanford Airport and were exceptional craftsmen. Clarence holds the Charles Taylor Master Mechanic award. They both were my mentors. When I taught gas welding at Reedley College I used the same technique taught me. Choose the correct torch tip; understand the application of heat, puddle control and practice, practice, practice.

There have been many important people who have come into my career as an airplane mechanic and aviator. Today we call these folks a "mentor", someone who dispenses freely of knowledge they learned from a lifetime of experience. I have been blessed with many mentors. Among subjects in my philosophy of life is the influence others have on one's path during a brief stay on this planet. Even though a person may have a long-term objective, it becomes how you reach that goal that makes life interesting. As one gets

older, especially as I approach 70–years, reflecting to achievements of the past become more and more frequent. Sometimes people ask, “how did you ever acquire all that knowledge,” and on occasion I reflect, “how DID I acquire all this knowledge?” Every person who has spent a lifetime working in a field of expertise has acquired a tremendous amount of knowledge and skills. Knowledge of skills falls into two categories; skills that are on one’s mind and skills that are in one’s hands. You may sit behind a desk with your hands folded and display the skills for managing people or a company. Or you may use your hands to design and execute a complicated repair to an airframe or solve a deeply puzzling problem. Here the success of the undertaking hinges in the innate ability to gather facts from various sources and apply them correctly to the problem at hand. If a mechanic possesses these skills and knowledge, he or she is a valuable employee, but an employee must have acquired a good work ethic to accompany the resume’.

During a brief encounter with NASA Dryden Flight Research Center at Edwards Air Force Base I was able to meet many knowledgeable people. Some gave freely of their experiences while others guarded their knowledge and were unwilling to pass anything along. I worked in the Fluids Lab for a week under the direction of Ralph Stoddard and Bob Gleason. Both are retired now, but they taught me much about hydraulics and especially tube bending. I recall forming a thin wall titanium tube for a Lockheed F-104. It was about 6 feet long and had 27 bends in it. My experience at NASA Dryden in 1982 during a Sabbatical leave formed my future as a mentor.

My dear friend Frank Rezich and I have discussed how we can keep the torch burning. How can we pass along our knowledge, learned over a lifetime of experience, to younger mechanics. After all, who will restore and maintain these airplanes after we are gone. We talked about having seminars, giving lectures, etc. But one thing we agreed upon was to write technical columns, such as THE TECHNICAL CORNER. And, as I look back over the past 10 years, the column has been a positive method to pass along this valuable information. All I need to do is spend some time with Frank, record his comments and transcribe into written data. I will do that! In the mean time you all will have to put up with more of my written words.

**RANDOM THOUGHTS**  
Mentors and Memories  
Part 2

Now, let's talk a little about flying. My first flight was in 1956 and I soloed in 1959 at Hanford, California in a Cessna 120. The airplane belonged to my uncle, George Baldrick. Yes, that is my shadow below the airplane. My flight instructor was Hubert Delap, who was a tremendous "seat of the pants" pilot. Hubert was a product of the Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP) of the early 1940's. He trained at Reedley College, where I once worked. My late uncle, George, who also had a large impact on my career, owned the airplane. I remember paying 37 cents per gallon for 80-octane fuel!! Hubert taught me how to fly by looking outside the airplane. He loved to cover the airspeed indicator and have me set a glide speed of 70 mph. He always said, "Listen to the whistling sound the airplane makes at 70 mph. After having an emergency landing with an Aeronca 11CC near Mariposa, California airport, I landed safely with out ever looking at an instrument. I called Hubert when I finally got home and thanked him for passing along his expertise. Shown below is a photo of Hubert and me with my Command-Aire at the Watsonville Antique fly-in in 1993. This turned out to be Hubert's last ride in an airplane; he died the next year.



I flew a short time with Paul Hansen, another ag pilot who flew a Travel Air crop duster around Seaside, Oregon. Paul flew in the Navy in F2G Corsairs and Grumman Bearcats, then transitioned into the first generation of jet fighters – the Grumman F9F

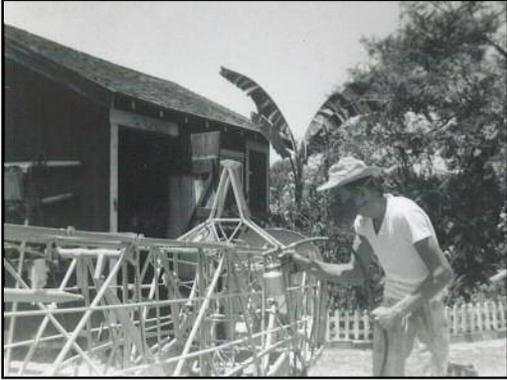
Cougar and F9F-6 Panther. He taught me some special skills as a young pilot. I realized early in my flying career that the only time I was rated as a "good" or "lousy" pilot was when I landed. It's still true today. Realizing this I spent countless hours flying the

pattern in the Cessna 120 perfecting the art of landing. To this day I want all my landings to be the same – the same approach with touchdown at the same spot on the runway, soft three-point – every time!

When I started training for my commercial rotorcraft add-on I flew with Clair Coe in Porterville, California. Clair had flown Ford Trimotors in Central America and was Cornelius Vanderbilt's personal pilot in a Convair 240. He was an excellent helicopter pilot and could make that old Bell 47D1 do anything. Even with the balsa wood main rotor blades. I did quite a bit of maintenance on the aircraft to make it better. I flew 50 hours in 22 days! The balsa wood blades would inhale moisture through a fiberglass covering and would go out-of-balance. It made the ride very uncomfortable in that the machine exhibited the classic 1 to 1 lateral vibration. I learned first hand about vibrations when flying that old Bell.

But there always seems to be a single incident that is memorable. I flew with Tom Mauser in a Naval Air Factory N3N, which had been purchased by a Navy pilot stationed at Lemoore NAS. We were up one day – I was in the front seat trying to make coordinated turns, when he spotted someone on a tractor plowing in a field. Tom flew a 450 Stearman for an operator in the area and he wanted to make a low pass on this fellow. He wiggled the stick, tapped himself on the head, and took over the controls. No matter what that airplane did, the ball in the turn-and-bank indicator never left dead center. I'll always remember that, and today I try to do the same thing as I maneuver the New Standard, Command-Aire or the Stearman. Keep the ball in the middle!

In 1958 I bought the remains of a 1942 Fairchild PT-19 for \$250.00. The parts were hauled to my parent's house and dumped on the front lawn. Needless to say my mother was not very happy. My grandmother lived just behind our house, so all parts were deposited in an old barn and I commenced working on the airplane. Here again I was fortunate to meet with mentors that shared their knowledge of airplanes. Louie Stolop and George Adams had a hangar and shop at the Compton Airport. I would buy certain supplies from George and he would tell me how to use them. I had never put fabric on a wood skinned structure before, so George told me how it was done. My father Leonard, who had absolutely no aircraft experience, helped me do various tasks during restoration. One in particular that I remember was steaming plywood skin around the leading edge of the center section. He rented a wallpaper steamer; it was slow but it worked. Our fabric job turned out really nice thanks to George Adams. I remember Louie was just completing the first Stolop-Adams "Starduster" homebuilt biplane out in the hangar at the time. I kept the airplane behind our house at my grandmother's place. There was plenty of room to store and even a small shop space behind the barn.



I eventually hauled the Fairchild to my uncle's hangar at Hanford for completion. A CAA inspector from the Fresno GADO licensed the airplane, and with about 20 hours of Cessna 120 time I was checked out and enjoyed finally flying an open cockpit airplane of my own. I had done most all the restoration myself, with the help of my mentors. They all played a significant part in my aviation career, although at the time I really did not realize it. As I look back it was the mentors that were an important part of my life, especially the craftsmen I met along the way, both mechanics and pilots.



When my checkout (which was about 70-minutes of dual) in the Fairchild was complete I desperately wanted to fly it to the Los Angeles basin to show my parents and friends. Having received my cross-country training from Al Sims, I asked if I could fly the airplane to Compton Airport. Al said, "If you think you can get there and find it, go ahead."



My logbook showed 29.5 hours of dual and solo when, on March 26, 1960, I headed for Compton. However the old Ranger ran out of oil at 6,000 feet in the mountains over Gorman and an emergency landing was imminent. I picked a spot (the engine was still running) and landed in a field at about the 2,500-foot level in the mountains that separated the

Los Angeles basin from the central valley of California. I dumped in some oil, pushed the tail under the power lines and proceeded to get back in the air, finally arriving at Compton in the afternoon. My father was pacing around because I hadn't showed up at the approximate time. But the remainder of the flight was not without excitement as the Ranger again ran low on oil over Hollywood. I remember looking down on the newly constructed Capital Records building in Hollywood, which was a round shape. But the Fairchild and I limped into to the Compton Airport. My father met me as I was dumping more oil into the tank. In my excitement to fly the airplane around the pattern I forgot to fasten my seat belt, probably not a good idea in an open cockpit airplane!

I decided to get my Airframe and Powerplant mechanic certificate in 1960. George suggested I go look at Reedley College, which was about a 45-minute drive from Hanford. I met up with Jim Harper who was an instructor in powerplants and he gave me the tour. Who would have ever thought that I'd be working with him at the college 7 years later in 1967! I decided to attend Northrop Institute of Technology in the Los Angeles area, near the International Airport, and enrolled there May of 1960. The fee was \$1,050.00 for 50 weeks of training to meet the FAA's minimum 1650-hour curriculum. I attended school 5 days per week from 7:45 a.m to 3:15 p.m, and then worked at an aircraft repair shop from 4:00 p.m to 10 p.m. plus 8-10 hours on Saturday. The owner was George Abbegelen who formerly taught sheet metal at Northrop. The first task assigned to me was repairing C-47 wing tips for the Air Force. Even after training in sheet metal skills at Northrop I didn't know where to start. However with a little coaching I was deep into the job. Near the end of my training I talked with George about staying on after graduation because I was to enter the Army in November 1961. He said when I graduated and had my temporary A&P in hand, come see him and he would give me a "substantial" raise. When I finished in April 1961 I laid the temporary on his desk and he gave me my substantial raise as promised. He raised me from \$1.50 per hour to \$1.60 per hour! In retrospect that should have been a clue as to the lousy pay I would receive as an airplane mechanic through most of my career! But like most others before me, I pressed on.

I entered the Army in November 1961 and eventually wound up in Dothan, Alabama for 15 weeks of advanced training. Five weeks was spent going over basic aircraft mechanic knowledge that could be applied to either fixed or rotary wing aircraft. My class was assigned to rotary wing school; the next 5 weeks was spent on Bell H-13 and Hiller H-23 helicopters, followed by 5 weeks on Sikorsky H-19 and H-34 heavy helicopters. I was assigned to the 2nd Armored Division at Fort Hood, Texas (General Patton's old "Hell on wheels" division). However there was a surplus of helicopter mechanics so with my A&P in pocket they assigned me to the fixed wing Periodic Inspection crew, working on Cessna L-19 "Bird dog" and DeHavilland L-20 "Beaver" aircraft. My previous P&W R-985 experience came in handy when troubleshooting the Beaver's. I spent a few months TDY to the Aero Club where I maintained Piper PA-11, PA-18, Cessna 140 and a North American L-17 Navion. There were some officers associated with the Aero Club and I maintained their privately owned airplanes, a Cessna 175, 180 and 182.

I worked at the local airport in Killeen, Texas for Aubrey Nobles whenever I was not soldering, maintaining Cessna 150, 172, 175, 180, 182, and 205 aircraft, along with an assortment of smaller aircraft like Piper J-3's, Aeronca 7AC, L-3, 7FC and even a high wing, twin-engine Champion "Lancer."

There was enjoyment in flying Piper J-3, and the aircraft owned by Aubrey Nobles. I started to restore an Aeronca C-3 just before I left the Army and Texas in November 1964 and did get to fly it later. At the Aero Club I flew Piper PA-11, PA-18, Cessna 140 and the L-17 Navion. The Navion was my first retractable gear airplane; they told me if I worked on it, get in and go fly just to make sure everything was alright. And so I did! There is nothing like checking yourself out in a retractable gear airplane. I eventually checked out a fellow from the White Sands, New Mexico Aero Club; the Col. got rid of the airplane because it was so difficult and expensive to maintain. I never saw the airplane again.

In 1964, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division of which I was assigned, convoyed to the Arizona Desert near the city of Parker. We were to take part in war games; the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division being located on the California side and the 2<sup>nd</sup> on the Arizona side of the Colorado River. Most of our airplanes were ferried to the desert from Ft. Hood in Texas. I was maintaining a Cessna 180 for Col. Robinson and he told me to get the airplane ready because he might be flying it to Parker. One day a phone call came in via field phones and eventually made its way to where my company was encamped. It was Col. Robinson, he was at Parker with a mechanical problem on the Cessna. "Get your tool box, I've arranged for you to get to the airport via a laundry truck run to Parker. I'll meet you there." I immediately did so, arriving to find out that the tachometer cable had failed. There were 2-other guys there with the Col., wearing civilian clothes but with black combat boots. I didn't know who they were. One of them said, "who is this guy, Col?" Col. Robinson stated that I was his personal mechanic responsible for keeping his 180 airworthy. I removed the tach cable and said I would try to get one made in Parker. Borrowing an airport car I took it to town. In the meantime the Cessna left. Later that afternoon I returned to the airport with a new cable and the Cessna returned from a "local" flight. All 3-got out of the airplane with large rolls of paper in hand. I replace the tach cable and returned to my tent in the desert. When the flag was dropped, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division was to construct pontoon bridges across the Colorado River and invade the territory West of the river. The 2<sup>nd</sup> immediately moved in and annihilated troops of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division. It was a magnificent tactical maneuver and some wondered how it was accomplished with so much precision. It seems that the two other guys with Col. Robinson were Generals and they had scouted the positions of all troops and tanks from the Cessna and marked these locations on the maps they were carrying. I later told Col. Robinson what I knew and he just grinned and said something like, "All's fair in love and war."

While camping on the desert one day, I spotted what appeared to be a biplane slowly flying overhead at slow speed. It looked like a Stearman and I thought to myself, what a lucky guy to be flying cross-country in a biplane. When I was discharged from the Army, Sandy and I moved back to Gardena in California while I contemplated our next step. We eventually moved back to Hanford with our daughter Cheryl. I worked for my uncle George at the airport and was assigned to repair Stearman wings at Elmer's Wing Shop in nearby Waukena. Through Elmer I learned the art of woodworking and was

assigned the task of rebuilding a set of Stearman wings that belonged to a Don Williams, who lived in Newhall, near the Los Angeles basin. Don had just started the Stearman Restorers Association; I think the year was 1965 and I eventually met Don. It turned out that his wings were off a Stearman he was ferrying from Ft. Pierce, Florida and he was the one I saw flying over the desert! Small world! Don encouraged me to join the SRA and my membership number was 27. My membership card was signed in ink by Lloyd Stearman. I have it framed and in my hangar, although I never met Lloyd Stearman.



I gained more experience working on Stearman's for George at the Hanford Airport. I built 3-sets of 4412 High Lift wings, one set seen on the airplane in foreground of fleet to left. They were constructed under an STC to Elmer's Wing Shop. Later I took a job in Madera working as a mechanic at West Coast Flying Service, where I maintained 4-Stearman's and a variety of

general aviation aircraft from Piper J-3 to Cessna 320. But it was a long drive from Hanford to Madera, taking over an hour each way. And in the winter time it was brutal because of the Tule fog that reduced visibility to almost zero for days at a time. I eventually bought a 1946 Aeronca 7AC from Ernie Saguspe that hadn't flown for some time. I made it fly and eventually flew back and forth to work, logging almost 50 minutes each way.

By 1966 I had torn down the Champ and restored it to a very nice little airplane of which I was proud. This photo to the right is me flying with Gerry Mahoney over the rice fields NW of Merced. I always liked this photo but don't remember who took it.

In 1966 I had left Madera and started my own business back in Hanford, restoring and repairing airplanes.



**RANDOM THOUGHTS**  
Mentors, Friends and Memories  
Part 3

I worked very long hours in my own shop located in an old beekeeper's building in Hanford. I rented the building from an elderly lady who lived next door and was always curious about all the airplane parts in her building. Recollections of working day and night remain as I tried to make enough money to support the family. We had rented a 3-bedroom 2-bath house in Parsons' Village on the West side of Hanford from Don Parsons, a friend of George's. I recollect the rent was \$85 a month and the year was 1965.

My small shop was always full of projects; so many in fact that it was difficult to finish any one of them. I had a Snow S2C that ground looped while landing on a levy bank near King City. The fuselage was twisted, the left landing gear torn off and the left outboard wing bent up. I hauled the airplane to Hanford on one of George's tractor-trailers, towing it with a 6-cylinder Chevrolet tank truck. It was a very long day and the Highway Patrol stopped me about 3-miles from Hanford. The officer said the trailer was not licensed and wanted to cite me, but I finally convinced him that I was hauling an agricultural airplane on an agricultural trailer. He left the scene and I made it to my shop building just before dark, as there were no lights on either the truck or the trailer.

As I began to cut, straighten and splice the fuselage I tried to make welded repairs, but my welds were horrible. Enter Clarence Lewis and Bill Stranahan. Both were expert welders, so while Clarence taught me how to weld, Bill welded some of the splices to the longerons I had made. It took a long time but I finally finished the airplane and reassembled it at the Hanford Airport. Ace Kidwell, whom I knew in Fresno, was a Snow distributor and when Rockwell bought out Snow Ace was the distributor for California. He sold the owner of the airplane a new S2C and took the damaged S2B in trade. When I finally finished the airplane, Ace came down to fly it to Chandler Field in Fresno to try to sell it. He left the pattern, then suddenly turned around and came back to the airport. I thought something was wrong, but he decided to buzz the place. I never saw that airplane again.

I restored a Bucker Jungman and repaired a Bucker Jungmeister, a Waco C-6 and several other small 65 hp ships. Then one day an old friend came to visit with an offer. Jim Harper, who did my IA work, instructed at Reedley College and he asked me if I would be interested in throwing my name into the hat for a position as an airframe instructor. I told him I was not interested, but he insisted and almost begged me to apply, saying he was told to turn in two names, and that I was the second person. Then he would be finished. So I let him place my name at the college. The next thing I knew I was interviewing. To make a long story short, I was offered the job beginning August 1967. Due to a misunderstanding about starting salary, the college finally offered me a contract starting at \$8,032 per year, to be paid in 12 equal payments. Sandy wanted me to quit working so much, so I reluctantly accepted. My first day at the college was the first day of class, because I was not under contract for the first two days. I'll never forget Loren Dietrich taking me into the small classroom to introduce the class to me. I remember he said, "Class, this is Mr. Lock. This is his first year and he comes from industry with a lot of information. Please welcome him." And with that he left me in

front of that class of 24 students. I had virtually no instructing experience but somehow muddled through the first class session. At the break I said to ‘D’, (he liked to be called ‘D’), “why did you do that to me?” He replied, “Because that’s what they did to me when I was hired.” We worked together for over 20-years. He was a great mentor and taught me many things, specifically how to write “Information Sheets, Job Sheets, Work Sheets, Assignment Sheets,” and all the other paperwork that went along with the new job. He was a master model builder and wrote a column on radio control models called “Walt and Wagger.”



Above left, “D” launches one of his many models. In background is the Aero building, my pickup and trailer with frame of New Standard D-25. Above right is “D” and I ready for test flight of the school’s Cessna 140, which he started to restore but due to illness couldn’t finish, so I finished it. It was the last “live” airplane I built at the college. L. D and I had a great time team teaching the Airframe and part of the General FAA curriculum.

I met many people at NASA Dryden, engineers, test pilots, mechanics, and office folks, all very talented. One person in particular was Tom McMurtry, who I first met in



1972. Tom owned and flew a Waco UPF-7 so we became immediate good friends. Tom was a junior test pilot when I first met him, but moved up through the ranks to become Chief Pilot, Director of Flight Operations and finally special assistant to the Chief Administrator. NASA Dryden Chief Pilot. Tom is shown left in his office with me and two of his children. Tom was instrumental in getting me into see what was going on at NASA and introduced me to many people. I knew

all the test pilots by first name. One unforgettable event was watching the first flight of NASA’s highly modified Boeing 747-200 and the space shuttle “Enterprise.” I was there on the runway when this massive “biplane” took off. Tom was riding right seat, Fitz Fulton was left seat and Skip Guidry was flight engineer. It was one of the most amazing flying machines I will ever see! The next photo is of me, Cheryl and Robert, there to see

the massive 747 with shuttle Enterprise mated on top. Here we are kneeling in front of the aircraft, unfortunately in silhouette.

I returned to Dryden to observe the first flight of Enterprise. After a briefing we loaded onto buses and convoyed to the edge of the runway 4-22 where we watched the 747 rumble down the runway and take to the sky. Right is my photo prior to the first flight of Enterprise. It was so exciting I could hardly hold the camera still!



We developed a co-operative work program with NASA Dryden where 1 or 2-student mechanics could spend the equivalent of 1-year working as mechanic helpers. This required 2-coordination trips per semester, which Loren Dietrich and I shared. It allowed us to meet many people from the top down, especially the test pilots and mechanics.

In 1982 I was granted a Sabbatical leave from the college and we almost went broke. The pay was full for one semester and half for two. Having made up my mind that I needed a full year away from the college to recharge batteries and get updated I developed a plan. I would spend 6-weeks with NASA, 5 weeks at Dryden and 1-week at Ames Research Center. While at Dryden During a brief encounter with NASA Dryden Flight Research Center at Edwards Air Force Base I was able to meet many knowledgeable people. Some gave freely of their experiences while others guarded their knowledge and were unwilling to pass anything along. I worked in the Fluids Lab for a week under the direction of Ralph Stoddard and Bob Gleason. Both are retired now, but they taught me much about hydraulics and especially tube bending. I recall forming a thin wall titanium tube for a Lockheed F-104. It was about 6 feet long and had 27 bends in it. My experience at NASA Dryden in 1982 during a Sabbatical leave formed my future as a mentor.



Chief of Maintenance was Clarence “Clancy” Haley, to whom I reported. He said, “let me know what you want to do and I’ll assign you there.” Beside the fluid lab I worked with a highly modified Ryan “Firebee” drone called the DAST (drone for aerodynamic structural testing). It was fitted with a fiberglass Super Critical wing, speed brakes and many other

unique features. It finally flew after I left, but on the first flight the right wing fluttered and it was lost. Camera footage from a NASA F-104 photo plane showed the ship flying off the 104’s right wing and then it was gone. It was there and then it wasn’t! Slowing the frames down you could see some pieces coming off the right wing tip, then the wing go divergent and break. Fortunately it didn’t roll into the F-104!

I traveled to the bay area to work at Ames Research Center to familiarize with experimental rotorcraft. NASA had the new Bell XV-15 tilt rotor aircraft and a very interesting



Sikorsky RSRA (rotor systems research aircraft) and was experimenting with an auto-hover technology installed in a Bell Huey.

The RSRA craft was a “compound” helicopter as it had short fixed wings and 2-external turbine engines that provided forward thrust, making this ship a 4-engine helicopter. It was designed to test experimental

rotor blades and to expand the top speed of the aircraft. It featured an ejection seat system that would shoot the crew out through the top of the cockpit. But there were whirling rotor blades there, so the sequence would be to blow off the blades, blow out the cabin top and then shoot the seats out. It was a very intricate system.



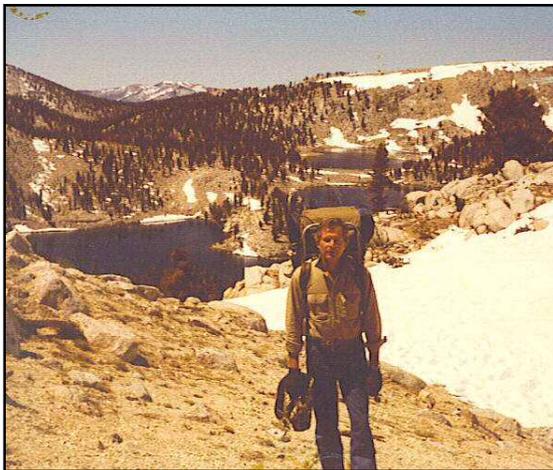
I was granted free entry into the Bell Helicopter 206B3 field maintenance course at Hurst, Texas for a 2-week class. Alex Whitmore allowed me to stay in his hangar loft at Justin Time Airfield and in exchange I licensed a couple of his airplanes and was able to fly some in the evenings. To the left are two of Alex's airplanes, an Aeronca L-3 (that I did an engine change to 85 hp when Alex was stationed at NAS Lemoore in California) and his Pietenpol. I got to fly

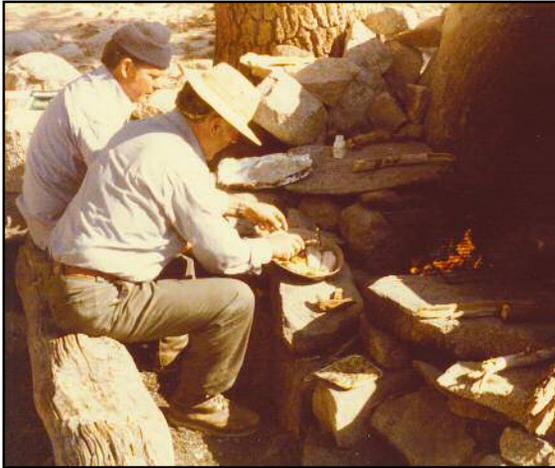


both ships and it was real fun!

Justin Time was a great place just full of antique airplanes, great hangars and homes. John Thurman was there with his large collection, Gordon Bourland with his beautiful Waco Taperwing, Art Knowles with his Command-Aire 3C3-T and much more.

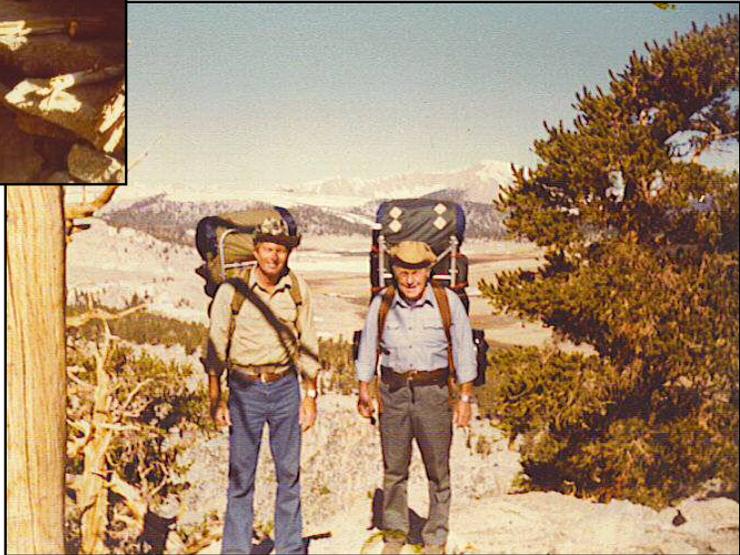
There were many adventures during my Sabbatical, but there is one more that may be of interest to those who read this. I was invited to join the Yeager boys, Chuck and Hal, for an 18-day hike into the high Sierra Mountains for fishing and relaxation. Of course I accepted, although I had never attempted anything like this in the past. I borrowed a backpack, bought some hiking boots, a fishing outfit with lures and found an old sleeping bag with mat that eventually proved to be inadequate at altitudes above 10,000 feet! It was quite a trek as we spent most the time at 10,000 feet and half of the time at the 12,000-foot level. We fished Upper Crabtree Lake at the 12,000-foot elevation and caught Golden Trout, just enough for dinner. All the rest of the fish were released.





Left was our afternoon routine, cooking golden trout over the fire. At each of our campsites Chuck had a grill stashed so we did not have to carry such a large item with us. Chuck and Hal had spent much time in the Sierra's and knew the terrain well. They also knew all the good fishing spots.

At right is Chuck Yeager and me at, I believe, Cottonwood Pass. Note Chuck's nifty pack and my inadequate pack. We each carried about 60-pounds. It was an 18-day forced march for me but I've never been in better shape then at the end of the trip. We entered the Sierra's at Lone



Pine, on the Eastern side of the mountains. Chuck said we hiked about 250-miles in all and came out at Cedar Grove in Kings Canyon National Park. There are so many stories from this trip, but I'll save them for another day. Note that we're at an elevation that is about where the timberline stops and it is barren above - just granite and rocks. When I finally returned to Reedley my family didn't recognize me because I had a beard and lost weight. I could hardly feel myself breathing! Chuck would occasionally come to Reedley to stay with my friends Korky and Irene Kevorkian. When Chuck did come to town he would stop by the college to meet the aero classes. One occasion he brought



Viktor Belinko, the Russian pilot who defected in a Mig 25. Viktor was a real character. He visited the aero department and signed textbooks in Russian. And for those students who still have those books, they must be a treasure. Left, with Chuck at Edwards AFB next to a T-38. Whenever I visited NASA I always called to the Douglas flight test facility to have lunch with Bud Anderson at either

the Officers Club or at the NASA cafeteria. Bud was there when the Air Force set the “time to climb” record in a McDonnell Douglas F-15. It was always great times at Edwards AFB. When Robert was playing high school basketball, NASA pilots Tom McMurtry and Bill Dana would drive up to watch some of his games. What great friends to have!

For me, one of the great thrills are the people you meet on your journey through life and I have been very fortunate to meet many in and out of the circles of aviation. And the journey continues!

## RANDOM THOUGHTS

### Command-Aire, Mentors and Friends Part 4

As one reaches the twilight years of life it is time to reflect on achievements and set objectives for remaining years. I always approached life with goals or objectives, some large some small, but always reachable. Some took an hour, some a day, some several weeks, some several years. But when you reached that particular goal it was a great feeling. One such multiple year goal was the resurrection of a 1929 Command-Aire; in fact it was an 11-year goal. Along the way I met many people, a few I would consider mentors but most became friends. The aviation community, particularly those involved in the restoration of antique aircraft, is very close knit. And so began a remarkable journey that would produce the original designer of the ship, a trip to the original factory building in Little Rock, Arkansas and the vice President of the original company.



When playing Army war games on the Mojave Desert of California and Arizona in 1964, I saw a biplane fly overhead. It turned out to be Don Williams, founder of the Stearman Restorers Association and I have a chance to meet him in 1965 after being discharged. In fact I was the one who repaired the wings to the Stearman he was flying over Parker, Arizona on that day.

From Don I eventually acquired 3-1929 Command-Aire 5C3 biplanes he had shipped from Ft. Pierce, Florida

that he purchased from J.R. McDaniel. They were not complete and were essentially just pieces from several airplanes. After storing for 12-years, I began to restore one airplane. In 1978 I hauled enough pieces out of the barn to assemble an airplane. Right is what it looked like at that time. After seeing a painting on a calendar at my uncle's hangar in Hanford, with the markings NR997E, it turned



out to be one of the airplanes I owned. So I decided that this airplane would be NC997E and I would do everything possible to return it to the Standard Category. The project

began in 1978 and by 1982 the fuselage was pretty well along. There were no drawings available so I had to rely on the parts I had plus I made drawings of what I needed.

From the old wings I resurrected new wings. My father Leonard came to Reedley to help build ribs and assemble the new wings. I still remember him whistling as he picked



up brass ¼” long brass nails with a pair of tweezers and carefully nailed the gussets in place. Before he left to return to his home I had him autograph the wing spar.



Dad’s message reads, “July 22, 1983, Bob, Happy Landings, Dad.” My dad is gone now and I have had many many happy landings. Each time I do an Annual Inspection on NC997E I see his message.



In 1978 I placed an announcement in EAA’s Vintage Airplane magazine requesting information about Command-Aire and any of its workers. I received one reply that the original president, Robert Snowden was still alive and living in Hughes, Arkansas. I contacted Mr. Snowden and eventually received a letter stating that Mr. Albert Voelmecke, Chief Engineer and designer for the company lived in Suitland, Maryland.

To make a long story short I met Albert Vollmecke at the foot of the Lunar Lander at the National Air and Space Museum and we began a long friendship until his death in 1994. His memory was sharp and he provided me with files, photographs and data from the original company. We met on one trip and searched for his type design drawings in a records storage center in Suitland, but found nothing.

Right, Al and I search looking through boxes of stored early Department of Commerce and CAA type design drawings. Al retired from the FAA in 1968 and he knew his way around the agency. He was instrumental in gaining access into the Federal Records Storage Center in Suitland, Maryland where boxes and boxes of raw data are stored, specifically from the earliest days of civil aviation in the United States. We did not find any of his drawings but did find some data that would be of future use in the restoration of the Command-Aire. It is an amazing story of how we got in and what we found. Right is box after box of valuable data that the FAA refuses to release.



In 1982 Al flew to the West coast and I brought him to Reedley in a Beech Bonanza to see his airplane. He didn't think that any of them had survived and it was a pleasure to watch as he looked over the ship. There are many stories and memories of his visit but they may be told another day. Just let me say that it was an absolute honor to meet this brilliant man and to share a small part of his later life. He would write letters every so often and phone wanting to know about the progress of the airplane. It was an absolute joy to know him.



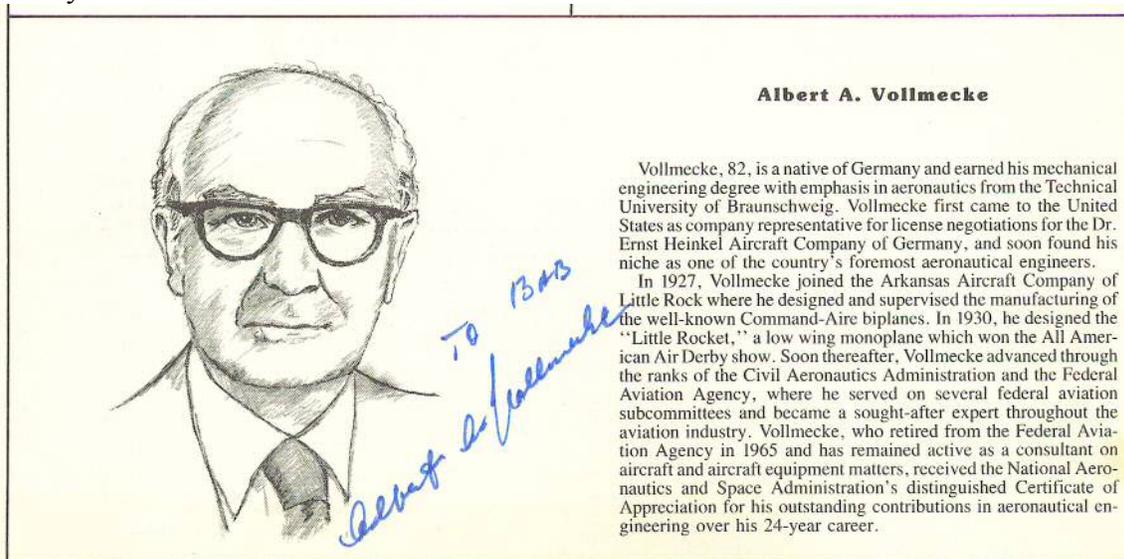
Left, Albert Vollmecke visits my shop in Reedley to inspect the airplane he designed in 1929. He went around each part, restored or unrestored sharing memories of how it was designed, what the factory was like in 1928-1931, how the company went bankrupt and ceased to exist due to the depression. Times were very difficult, but he laid most of the blame for the company's failure to president Robert Snowden. I would consider Al one of the most influential and important person I ever met. He asked me to display the Command-Aire at the 1989 Sun N Fun show in Lakeland, Florida. I tried to get it flyable but with hurdles from the FAA it

was impossible. So I built a trailer and hauled the airplane there. He flew in from

Washington, D.C and joined us there. My friend Joe Araldi was almost finished with his "Little Rocket" racer that Al designed for the Cirrus All American Derby, which the ship won. It was some of the most special memories of my life in aviation being with him.



Albert was inducted into the Arkansas Aviation Hall of Fame in Little Rock and I was invited to attend, along with Joe and Suzanne Araldi the members of the Vollmecke family.



While in Little Rock we met with former vice President of Command-Aire Charles Taylor. They were the only two original officials of the Command-Aire Corporation still

living. We visited the old factory building still standing. Photo following is factory today.



We were allowed inside and Al scurried about saying, “My office was over there, back there was the dope room, we built the Little Rocket there.” It was like he had never left. However, when the company went bankrupt and ceased to exist he said, “I placed all my drawings in a large safe, closed it, turned off the lights and we all left out the front door.” The end of Command-Aire! What a pleasure to have known these men. Charley Taylor read a compilation of Albert’s achievements and introduced those at the Vollmecke table. After the ceremony, Charley gave me his manuscript, which gave an intimate look inside the factory when it was operating from late 1927 to the middle of 1931.



Albert designed a superior airplane that was unfortunately terminated by the Great Depression and the fact that the factory no longer had a distribution network because they placed all their eggs in one basket by allowing the Curtiss Flying Service to be their lone distributor. When Curtiss bought the Travel Air manufacturing rights from Walter Beech, they dropped Command-Aire to market their Curtiss Wright Travel Air line.



Above, my Command-Aire 5C3, NC997E in flight over the Wisconsin Dells with brother Steve in front cockpit. Photo by Giles Auliard on 2006 American Barnstormers Tour.

**SOME RANDOM THOUGHTS**  
Mentors, friends and Achievements  
Part 5

My service to Reedley College a little over half finished when the FAA revised the Airframe curriculum to deemphasize wood and fabric structures, welding and a couple other skills they considered outdated. These were subject areas in which I taught, so when shrinking lecture and lab instruction I needed to add something new. It was Advanced Composites, a subject that old woodworkers could readily adapt. As I set forth on the journey, the only experience I had was a little fiberglass work on ag airplane hoppers, wheel fairing repairs, etc. The administration at the college was very helpful in funding seminars, such as SME (Society of Manufacturing Engineers), SAE (Society of Automotive Engineers) and allowing me to attend an advanced composite school at Abaris Training in Reno, Nevada. Under the direction of Mike Hoke, we became immediate friends because he was a pilot and I was interested in what he did. He invited me to join the CACRC (Commercial Aircraft Composite Repair Committee), that was under the direction of the SAE. Here I met with very intelligent folks from the composite community from all over the world and got a sense of what was actually going on. I served on the Training Task Group for 7-years as we struggled to develop a training curriculum, testing standards and licensing procedures for a composite repairman certificate for the FAA. Most of the major airlines were represented and I made numerous contacts both in the states and abroad. My friends at United Air Lines in San Francisco reviewed my curriculum and projects and provided me with much data that they used in instruction. It was a great time in the early days of advanced composites. Above, at KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, Amsterdam, Holland with CACRC group in 1994.



I would be remiss if my long time friend Virgil Leasure was not included in the advanced composite story. Virg was a do-it-all kind of guy, very talented in a variety of skills. He was hired as our lab technician and he could do anything; just present the problem and Virg would solve it. I needed an oven to cure 250-degree F advanced composite materials that included a vacuum system. We found a paint curing oven available surplus up at Rough and Ready Island near Stockton that the Air Force had used to cure paints, except it only went to 180

degrees F. Virgil not only made the oven stable at the required 250-degree temperature but constructed an internal vacuum system capable of holding 22-inches of suction. It worked and was a great addition.

Well, there were many stories and memories of 31-years at Reedley College, most good and some not so good, but I made retirement in June 1998. Having began this career August 1967, the total was 31-years. I recall when my father retired from National Supply Company in Torrance after 35-years on the job. I thought, "How could one spend 35-years with the same company doing essentially the same job." And here I was giving 31-years of my life to the same entity! But Sandy and our friends threw a great retirement party at the house. I had a lady A&P student by the name of Georgann Bruce and she volunteered to locate as many former students as she could to be invited to my celebration. It was amazing; there were former students from my very first class in 1967-1968! It was like the old T.V program, "This is your life!"



Left, the party of a lifetime, orchestrated by Sandy, Cheryl, Robert, Georgann and many others. I could have never asked for more than to spent time with fine folks I helped train and who became successful in life. Below, my mother Wilma and daughter Cheryl, hard workers both.



Left, son Robert, wife Sandy and brother Steve.

After retirement from the college, I continued to work on various projects. In 1996 I had begun to help Robert restore a 1929 New Standard D-25 biplane he purchased in 1990, working with Dick Hansen to build a new set of wood wings from scratch. It turned out to be a 2-year project and they were finally finished in 1998.



Antique aircraft restoration was always in my blood, having started with George Baldrick and his Stearman agricultural aircraft and then my Fairchild PT-19, way back in 1956 and 1957. And so it was that my career would return to restoration, but more than that it was an opportunity to fly these fabulous airplanes on a regular basis. Robert started Waldo Wright's Flying Service in 1995 and we began flying in 2000, giving rides at weekend air shows in Ohio, Indiana and Michigan.



Left, my friend Dick Hansen of Fresno who is an outstanding wood wing guy. Dick and I met when he was restoring a Boeing Stearman that had been lost in the Sierra Nevada Mountains for over 48-years. When the Stearman was finished and flying he wanted more wings to build, so he and I built 2-complete sets of New Standard D-25 wings. My Command-Aire is in background, being displaced from hangar by large New Standard. When the wings were finished,

Sandy and I loaded them on the trailer and drove cross-country to Hampton, New Hampshire where the rest of the airplane was being restored. It was quite a trip; we looked like the Clampet's moving to Beverly Hills as I had built an aluminum cover for the wings in attempt to keep them dry. It worked but it was a long and tedious trip covering over 3,000-miles. But the wings arrived safely at Sinclair Aircraft at the Hampton Airfield and the next saga of my life had begun;

I test flew New Standard D-25, NC9756 in June 2000 and after the testing and familiarization was completed Robert and I immediately began flying passengers at weekend air shows around Ohio. In 2002 we began operations at Fantasy of Flight in Polk City, Florida. These large 5-place open cockpit biplanes are a barnstormers dream and are fun to fly.



## RANDOM THOUGHTS

### Part 6

#### Mentors, Friends and Special People

It is truly amazing that over the years I have met so many famous people, both in and out of aviation. Sandy and I were in the Los Angeles area visiting and, of course, I had to get to an airport. So went to Torrance to see Travel Air 4000 owner Dick Smith. While there I had an opportunity to fly with the late Gene Gast in his Stearman to Chino for a close look at the Northrop N9M Flying Wing. Friend Ron Hackworth flies the aircraft and was doing some maintenance and modification to the aircraft and an invitation came to join in the fun. I had never flown over the Los Angeles basin in an open cockpit biplane before and it was quite an experience.

Arriving at Chino we met Ron in the hangar fitting an auxiliary fuel tank into the space behind the cockpit to give the aircraft added range (its range was very limited because it was purely an experimental aircraft not designed for cross country flying). Left with Ron

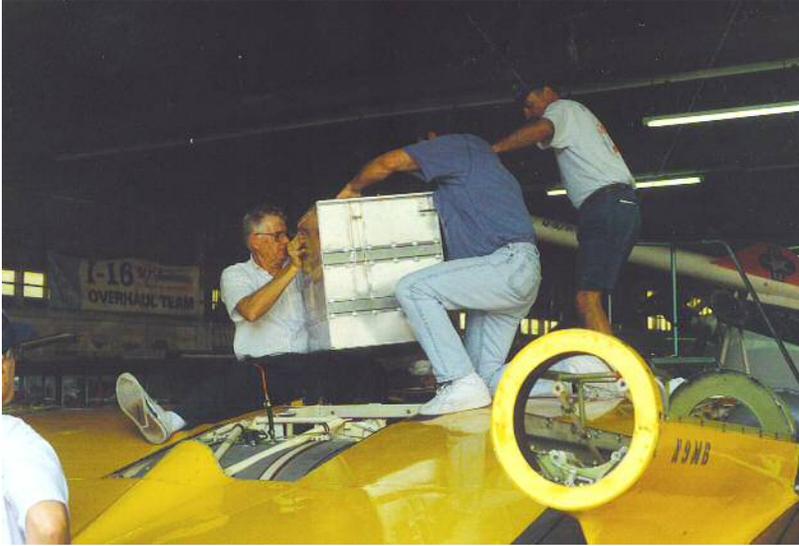


Hackworth installing auxiliary fuel tank in Northrop N9M. As the day progressed a very special visitor stopped by for lunch. Retired General Robert Cardenas was the B-29 pilot who dropped Chuck Yeager when he was flying the Bell X-1 at Muroc during the days of Mach 1

assault. Cardenas went on to test fly the Northrop YB-49, the turbine powered flying wing. General Cardenas is a history book when it comes to test flying at Muroc and Edwards AFB. We went to Flo's Café for lunch, along with a large group from the museum. When nobody offered to sit next to Bob Cardenas, I



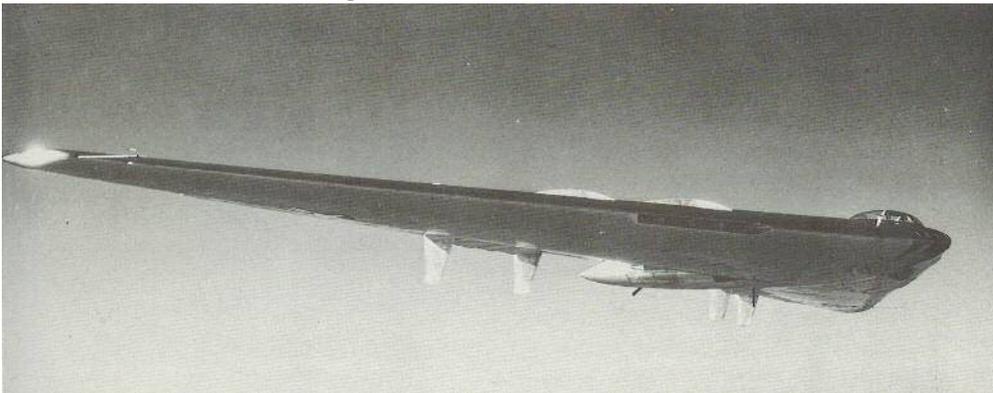
immediately jumped at the opportunity. He said sit across from me. I did. And we talked flying wings and the B-29 for most of the time. He had some interesting stories about the demise of the YB-49 and W. Stuart Symington, the first Secretary of the Air Force under president Harry Truman.



After a long lunch it was back to work on the N9M and more fitting of the newly fabricated fuel tank. At the day came to an end my final reward was a cockpit checkout in the only flying Northrop N9M with pilot Ron Hackworth. What a great day, to be near the N9M and meet and talk with Bob Cardenas.

The Northrop N9M was a proof of concept scaled down version of the XB-35 and later the YB-49, which Cardenas flew at Edwards.

I remember Gen. Cardenas saying the Air Force wanted him to conduct flight tests on the XB-35, but he didn't want to fly anything that had that many pusher propellers! He opted for the jet version. Unfortunately the aircraft was an unstable bombing



platform. The YB-49 would have been a great aircraft with a Stability Augmentation System

System, but unfortunately it wasn't invented yet.

Many years ago while visiting my friend Cliff Anderson at the Hanford Airport I met John Martin. Cliff introduced him as a former Douglas Aircraft test pilot, so of course, I asked him what he had flown. He said he made the first ten flights in the Douglas D-558-2 Skyrocket at Muroc (now Edwards AFB) on February 4, 1948. John had just delivered a Douglas DC-4 to England and had secured vacation time from Douglas for some rest and relaxation and had reserved a penthouse in Paris, France. However, before he left Los Angeles the company asked all test pilots to forward a bid as to how much money they would charge for the first ten flights in the Skyrocket. Martin said he was not interested in flying the aircraft so made a ridiculously high bid, submitted it, got into the DC-4 and headed for England and his vacation. After the successful delivery he traveled to Paris and checked in the hotel, only to be notified the next day that he should return to California immediately for he was selected to fly the Skyrocket! I cannot recall what he bid for each flight, but think it was around \$10,000 for each flight, a large sum of money in 1948.



NASA Dryden Flight Research Center Photo Collection  
<http://www.dfrc.nasa.gov/gallery/photo/index.html>  
NASA Photo: E49-221 Date: 1949 Photo by: NASA photo

D-558-2 being towed on lakebed

The D-558-2 was originally designed with a Westinghouse turbojet engine and would take off from the ground rather than be air launched. I remember John telling me that the aircraft would not get out of ground effect because it was underpowered, so he would have to fly the entire length of Rogers Dry Lake (27-miles) a few feet above the ground. To remedy the problem Douglas engineers attached two JATO bottles (Jet Assisted Take Off) to the aircraft to boost it in

the air. Unfortunately I have no photos or audiotape of John and me together, so I recite this story from memory. John Martin and his daughter operated a travel agency in Fresno, California when I first met him. He was a very interesting man with a significant aviation background.

**RANDOM THOUGHTS**  
**MEMORIES AND FRIENDS**  
Part 8



I finished 50013 in 1959 and flew it to the Compton Airport in the Los Angeles basin, to return back to the central valley for the annual West Coast Waco Club gathering in June. It was my first time flying my own airplane to an air show and was absolutely thrilled when the above picture appeared in the magazine of the Antique Airplane Association in July 1959. Arriving on a Friday afternoon I was received well by the local people and little did I know at that time that I would be a mainstay for the fly-in over the next 35-years. I was 20-years old on this first visit.

After registering there was an “early bird” dinner served by the local’s in one of the tee hangars. Between the hangars were rows of picnic tables placed for guests. As more-and-more people and airplanes arrived, groups formed and the flying stories began. One group was headed by “Mr. Travel Air”, none other than Mr. Frank Rezich. I would come to know Frank very well a few years later and we would consider ourselves as “brothers” from then on. I would listen intently to the conversation of these “old timers,” not saying anything because I didn’t want to make a fool of myself in front of these special people.

Each of the following years I would join a group and just listen. While in the Army between 1961 and 1964 there was no way to make the show, so was absent 1962-1966. During my early days at the Merced show there were many unique airplanes on display, but one I shall never forget was a nicely restored Porterfield called “Spinach” because it was painted several tones of green and had a couple hanging plants inside the cockpit. I remember the owner played trombone and on one special early bird dinner there was a kind of impromptu band formed that provided live entertainment for the crowd sitting on those benches between and hangar rows.

Below, my pal Frank Rezich and his daughter Kathy Crowley taken recently when Frank received his Wright Brothers Master Pilot award from the FAA.



The 1972 show I flew in my recently restored Aeronca 7AC Champ, 2808E. Once again, the Friday early bird party was well worth the effort to come early and the old timers were at again – including Frank Rezich. Frank had his Travel D4D, NC606K in attendance and it was great to see him again and look over that famous Travel Air. Below, the Champ flying northwest of Merced over some rice paddies in 1972 when it was just assembled. In fact the wheel covers were not installed at this time.





The Command-Aire was still stored away and it would not be ready to fly to Merced until 1990, but for me it was a triumphal return because now I finally had a biplane and would be parked in show center.

Perhaps one of the biggest thrills and biggest challenge of my life was to assemble the Command-Aire in Lakeland, Florida, test fly it there and then fly it cross country from Lakeland to Reedley.



Above, 997E and I prepare for a very long 2750-mile cross-country from Lakeland, Florida to Reedley, California. I purchased enough sectional charts for the trip and had them spread across the floor of the Araldi cabin, using a straight stick to draw course lines and a ruler to mark off 20-mile increments along the course. My wife Sandy and daughter Cheryl were there and would drive along the course line with our pickup, meeting me every night. The stories along each leg of the flight are numerous and interesting but too lengthy to tell here. On the seventh day we reached Reedley in the afternoon.



There were friends and family present plus the local media. All the television channels in the Fresno area market covered my arrival. It was a great culmination to a fabulous trip, just like back in 1929.

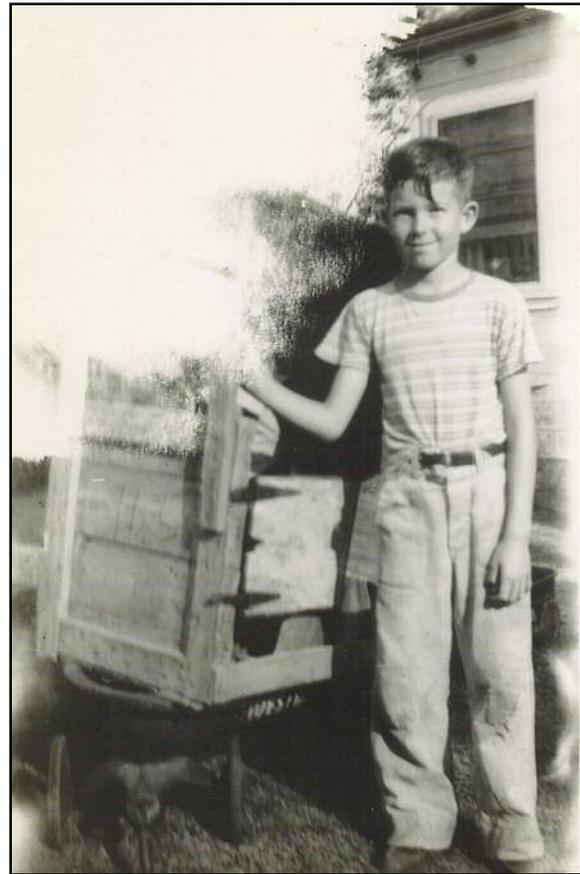


Above, the Command-Aire was a huge hit at all the air shows in 1990. I finally had made it back to be with those friends in the aviation world. I went to the 1990 early bird gathering at Merced, registered, got to park front and center and enjoy the catered dinner at the same picnic tables between the hangars. As I sat at a table friends came by and began to gather around me. All of a sudden I was the old guy telling flying stories to those who were interested and they were listening to ME. The Merced fly-in had come full circle for me. From listening to those old timers spinning tall tales during my first show in 1960 to the return of the Command-Aire in 1990, I was the old timer spinning tall tales. What a great feeling.

### WHAT MADE ME WHO I AM

One word ---- ACCOUNTABILTY. I had great parents who set positive examples when I was young – I was always held accountable for my actions as I grew up. I also learned a great work ethic – always be early to the job and give the employer my best. I never looked at an 8-hour day but rather how much I could accomplish in the day. Am recalling the times when I worked for my uncle at the Hanford Airport and having my time card show 100-hours per week at the height of crop care season. I certainly can't do that now!

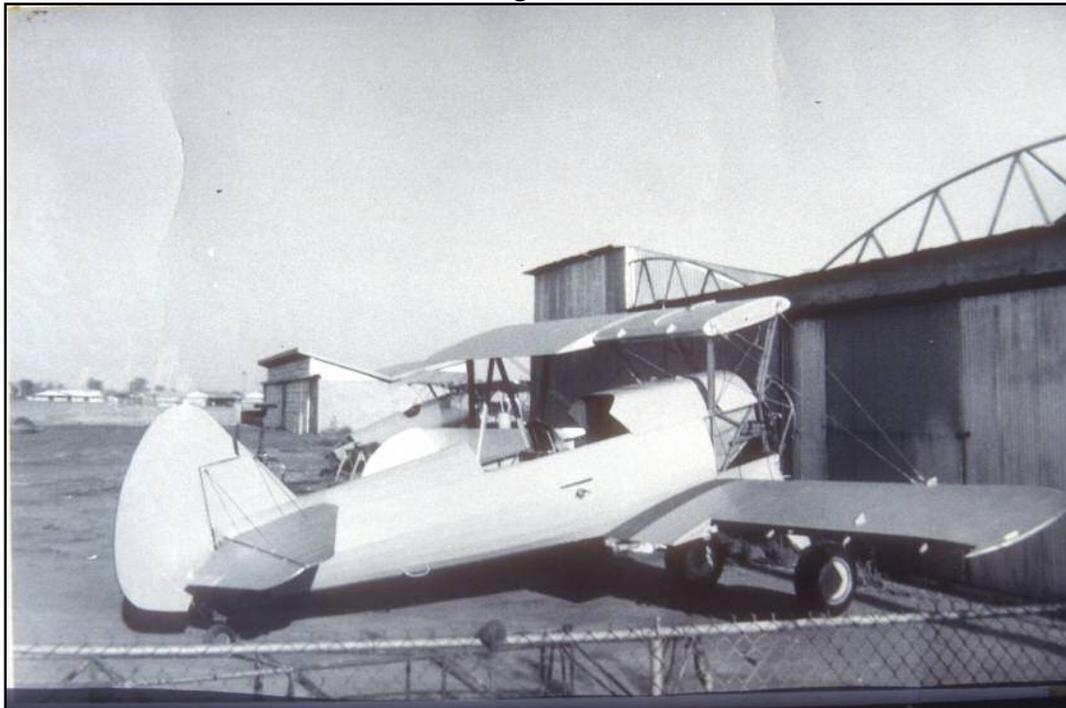
From the youngest age I can remember, building and maintaining things was always interesting.



As the years went by my objective in life changed as I met new mentors who influenced a different path. Realizing that I wanted to fly and become an ag pilot in Stearman aircraft, that objective became stronger with age. By the time I was old enough to learn to fly, another stark realization came along. There were many pilots available and so to break into a Stearman seat would be difficult, particularly a low time pilot. So, realizing this, the next logical step was to become an aircraft mechanic, work for an operator who might give me a chance at a seat, and so that became the next objective, that was realized in 1961 when the FAA A&P certificate was earned from the Northrop Institute of Technology. But the seat never came and I learned that an experienced mechanic familiar with Stearman biplanes was actually worth more to an operator than giving me a seat. I learned how to build, repair and maintain Stearman aircraft – how to assemble and rig them so they flew “hands-off” right out of the hangar door. I mentored under the direction of Elmer Ruzicka who taught me how to build and repair wood wings. I learned fabric work from Richard Salvador, gas welding from Bill Stranahan and Clarence Lewis. I learned so much about airplanes and aviation from my uncle, George Baldrick. I always hoped that George would give me a Stearman seat, but he was afraid I would get hurt and his sister (my mother) would reap havoc on him. So I never realized that objective of flying an ag Stearman. At that point my life focused on being a good aircraft mechanic who could also fly. And that’s my story. Would I trade it for something different if I could? No. But the opportunities I had as a young person are no longer there – and those times will never happen again.



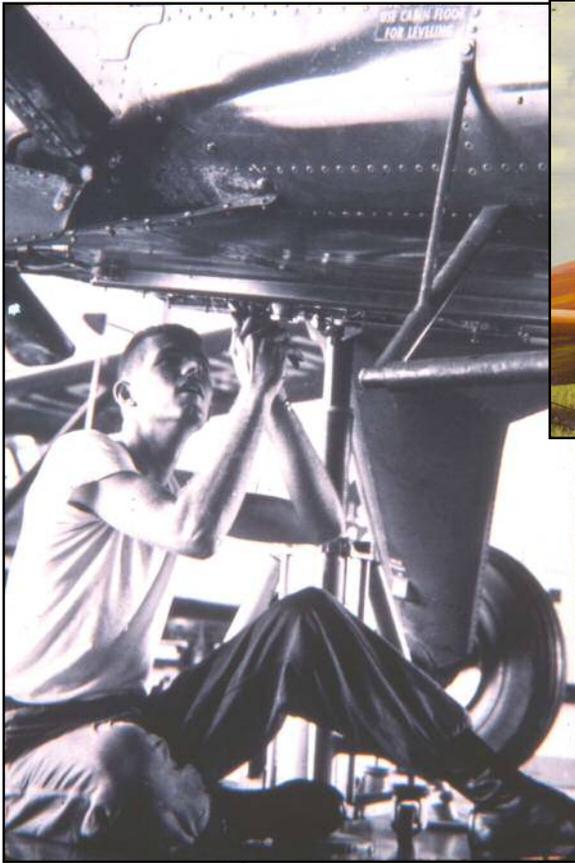
Nagel Aircraft Sales, Compton Airport, unlicensed mechanic, 1958 First job after high school graduation.



One of George Baldrick's 450 hp Stearman biplanes going together, Hanford Airport, 1960



Aubrey Nobles Flying Service, Killeen, Texas – 1964



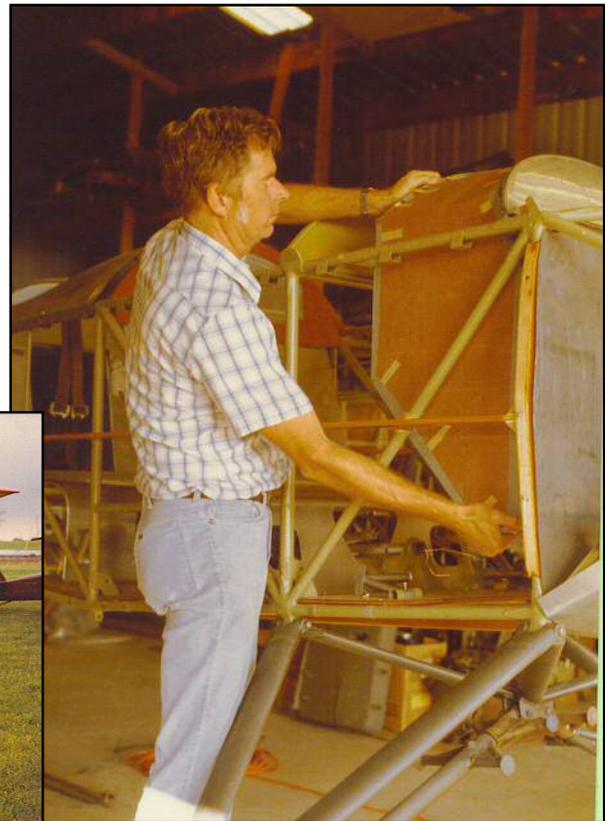
U.S Army, 502<sup>nd</sup> Aviation Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division, Ft. Hood, Texas, 1963



Spartan C-2, Justin Time Airfield, Justin, Texas 1982



Justin Time Airfield, Justin, Texas, 1982



My Reedley Shop, 1986



Reedley College Taylorcraft L-2M at Eckert Field with Wendell Eckert.



Me flying the L-2 somewhere around Reedley.



Instructing Bell 47G rotorcraft, Reedley College, 1980's.



Barnstorming in a New Standard D-25



With my favorite airplane of all time, at the Calistoga Invitational fly-in, 1994

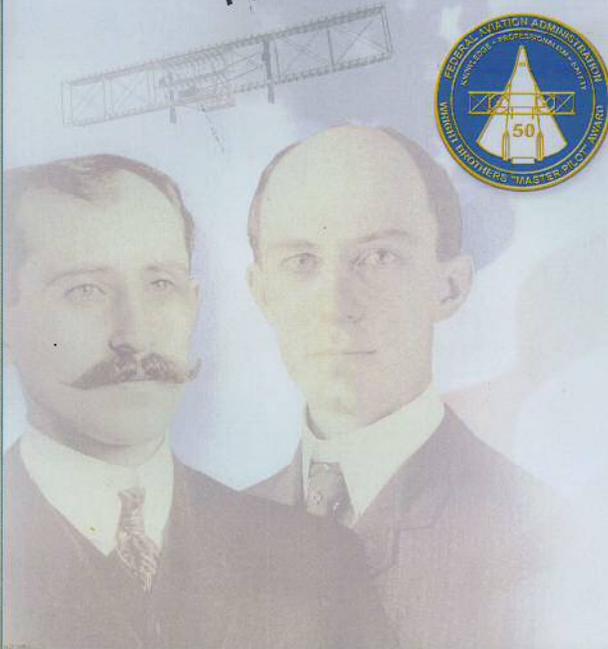


On short final at Reedley Municipal Airport, 2005



With 997E, 2012

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION



**The Wright Brothers  
"Master Pilot" Award**

*presented to*

**Robert George Lock**

*in appreciation for your dedicated  
service, technical expertise, professionalism,  
and many outstanding contributions that  
further the cause of aviation safety.*

*John M. Allen*  
Director, Flight Standards Service

**December 11, 2010**

*Date*

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION



**The Charles Taylor  
"Master Mechanic" Award**

*presented to*

**Robert G. Lock**

*in appreciation for your dedicated service,  
technical expertise, professionalism, and many  
outstanding maintenance contributions, to  
further the cause of aviation safety.*

*Maureen C. Blakely*

Administrator

July 29, 2006

Date