

Thirty-five Years at the Outer Marker

Comfort in a Cabin Waco, and Flying on the Water

Much as I loved flying in the Adirondacks, our business in this lovely area, even during the summer season, was just too slim. Besides this, in order for us to do any business, it was necessary to do considerable non-revenue flying between mountain lakes looking for it.

In the spring, as I had done for the last few years with the F-2, we rigged the new cabin Waco, tuning it to its float gear while she sat in her corner of Harry Ward's hangar.

We then flew her off the airport's new runway, rolling on four Model "A" Ford wheels that were temporarily rigged to the floats' integral beaching gear axle tubes. Airborne, and while circling over the lake, tapered wheel retaining pins were released by lightweight cables that were temporarily run to the cockpit windows and taped to the leading edge of the lower wings. The Ford wheels were then pushed off the axles, dropping into the lake with a huge splash. This wheel dumping

was carried on while leaning far out the cabin side windows, working the wheels off by the use of a long broom handle. This saved many hours of work that previously had been done under often times difficult conditions. In only a few minutes we could be switched over to floats and completely ready for the summer.

Business at Alexandria Bay the next season was very good and at our dock the cabin Waco attracted many people who previously had just not been interested in sitting in the F-2's drafty open cockpit, donning a cloth pilot's helmet in order to make a scenic flight over the 1,000 Islands. Also, it was a very pleasant summer for us. Peg and I rented a comfortable summer camp right on the river's shore with the seaplane swinging nights on a mooring in a shallow protected cove only a few hundred yards from our front porch.

By the end of the first summer it was clear, however, that the new

cabin Waco was short on power, and prior to hunting season in the Adirondacks we replaced her 225 hp Jacobs engine with a 285 hp Jacobs, and this made a fine performing airplane out of her.

In the meantime, correspondence had been taking place with several Chambers of Commerce in Florida. We settled on spending the winter at Winter Haven, in central Florida, selected because I had no desire to operate the airplane in salt water with its associated and serious corrosion problems.

In November, Peg and I took off to fly her south. Most of the route we followed the Inland Waterway just inside the Atlantic coastline because this provided protected waters within gliding distance most of the way. For one of our southbound stops, we overnighted at Wilmington, North Carolina, with the Waco tied out between two large docks with high pilings. I didn't sleep much during the night and it was

by Holland "Dutch" Redfield



The YKS-7 on its land lubber gear makes a low pass.

raining torrents and gusting hard as dawn broke. The phone rang; it was the hotel desk advising that a tug was waiting to get dockside where the Waco was tied. We checked out quickly and took a taxi to the waterfront.

The airplane was boarded in a pelting cold rain and getting aboard was not easy in the fast ebbing tide as Peg and I clambered down slippery, rickety ladders. The assistance of two yellow-slickered dock workers was necessary as her stern line was eased, then her bow line slowly pulled in, putting her close enough so we could step from the ladders to her rain-slicked floats. We then hunched our way aft beneath the lower wing, up the two short steps to the lower wing walkway, and into the dry cabin.

The engine was pre-primed and ready to go as the lines were cast off by those on the dock.

There was no other way to do it, and fortunately the Jacobs caught on the first cylinder. She was running and whether we liked it or not, we were also moving. The water rudders, positioned by the pedals beneath my feet, now knifed into the flowing water streams and we swung away from the gusting wind toward open

harbor. The now following waves were white capping and heavy gust driven rain streaked the windshield and drummed the taut fabric on top of the fuselage. It was an ugly day and if there had been some other place to tie up, I'd have pulled back in, but there wasn't, because the night before we'd spent half an hour

water, steering carefully between the barnacled, tarred pilings of two commercial wharves. But as we neared I could see that the strong ebbing tidal current was sweeping us seaward and it was necessary to crab her sharply over the bottom, tracking so as to miss the heavy high pilings that could easily bash in our fragile spruce wingtips.

As we cleared the protection of the wharves, a strong gust hit her and heeled her and a sharp, wave-slapping, propeller-spraying blast from the engine was needed to swing her away from the wind and onto a down-wind course down the

Dutch's Waco ZKS-7, set up on the temporary beaching wheels "borrowed" from a Ford Model A. The engine is a 285 hp Jacobs.



flying up and down the waterfront looking for a spot to overnight. Where we'd tied her was the only place.

The evening before we had fueled with marine gasoline and with 420 pounds of fuel on board, the Waco was heavily loaded. Even with the wind I would need a long, punishing run to get airborne and thereafter clear a bascule bridge that would be in our climb-out path.

After a long downwind taxi, I idled her back, pulled the water rudders up, and let her weathercock into the wind. The white-capping waves now slapped the float bows and the idling prop flung back their spray. Streaking cats-paws showed the gusting wind patterns on the harbor's surface ahead of us as the throttle in the center of the instrument panel was opened full and locked there with its knurled knob. The Jacobs roared and with the wind and the waves she was quickly on the steps. The waves spanked hard against the planing float bottoms, jarring us with lighter and lighter taps as the wings grasped the air, then lifted us free and into turbulent, but far smoother, flight than the very rough waters we had just lifted off from.

The right wing was lowered and we slowly banked away from the wet gusting northeast wind. In the low level eddying turbulence both my hands and my feet were very busy, feeling for, and correcting for, and averaging the buffeting upsets from my planned curving trajectory. Pressured inputs to the ailerons and rudder were simultaneously applied and also carefully coordinated in order to avoid unpleasant, sloppy, yawing flight for my very pregnant wife, Peg.

In a short time the wings were leveled and the compass beneath the rain-smeared windshield settled down and showed us heading south again. The rain and windswept buoy-marked waterway was only few hundred feet beneath us and for the next several hours, and to keep the waterway in sight, we took every bend of it, banking gently left, then

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right, and we were buffeted and gusted and rained on. Neither of us liked it, but there simply was no place we could ride the storm out and after a while we became accustomed to it.

Ahead we'd see, then catch up with, then zoom over and quickly leave behind many pleasure boats also heading south, his sudden awareness of our swift passage above him at mast height evidenced by his wavering surprised wake as we looked back over the dripping, streaming trailing edges of the lower wing panels. Then an occasional gentle pull-up to skim a telephone-poled bridge spanning the marshy winding shores of the waterway, slowly waggling the Waco's stubby red wings at a decrepit old Ford, splashing its way along muddy roads and up and over the bridge as we flew by. And our passage flushed many geese and ducks, but most of them had more sense than we as they fed and paddled along the marshy shores till the scudding storm abated.

With no warning, there was a sud-

den loud bang, and the airplane shook, and next to me Peg gave a cry of pain. I was puzzled, as I did not know what had happened and our low skimming flight in the rain and turbulence continued to require all my attention. Peg was there beside me, sobbing and clutching her leg, yet everything seemed normal with the airplane. I was concerned and finally between tears we sorted out that the plane's brake handle was the culprit. Used only during land-plane operations, it had somehow snapped back and hit her left shin with a vicious whack. The hook for the seaplane's water rudder retract cables had been attached to this unused handle at the time the water rudders were retracted for takeoff and we must have flown into a frightened low flying duck, which probably struck one of the retract cables down in the float gear, causing the handle to snap back. It had been a sharp whack and it hurt.

In a couple of hours the scudding, dark, wet clouds began drying out, gradually lifting to a clearing gray, with occasional patches of blue. We were able to let the Waco climb now and the air smoothed. The powerfully surfing, curving shore of the Atlantic off our left wings met the now blue sky far ahead to the south. In the snug cabin the outside warmth we were flying into was ducted in to us, and it felt good. We munched a sandwich and I rubbed Peg's bruised leg and we laughed.

At Jacksonville, I fueled in shirt-sleeves and by late afternoon we touched her down at her new home on Lake Howard, at Winter Haven. Barb, who was driving our car down, was not there yet.

Besides a few charters, then a couple of deep-winter occasions where we were hired to spend entire nights flying low over orange groves, stirring up the air to possibly prevent frost damage, plus a few passengers carried on weekends. My dreams that Florida could play a big part in a 12-month-a-year seaplane operation turned out to be a giant flop, and as it turned out I had to borrow money

so I could get my pregnant wife and the airplane home.

As part of an effort to make the Florida operation work, we believed we could make a few additional dollars if we had the capability of flying after dark, on weekend evenings. After much trial and error, Barb and I, from lakeshore trees, were able to finally saw up four small bamboo rafts that wouldn't flop over after we launched them. Kerosene truck flares were secured to the rafts, which were then anchored on a line parallel to the wind. On the airplane we mounted a single landing light on one of the float support struts.

The first night we tried our new system the Waco had just lifted off and was clearing the tree'd lakeshore and in our climb-out path ahead it was pitch black. Suddenly there was a loud clattering and we both thought, "What a place for her to quit!" yet the big Jacobs continued running beautifully and we were unable to determine where the banging noise was coming from. I switched on our new landing light and in its reflected glow we discovered a small hinged cowling that gave access to the rear accessory section of the engine was flapping wildly in the powerful prop stream.

From our position, to land immediately was impossible and the cowling would surely batter itself to pieces by the time we got back around the lake. I asked Barb to fly and passed the swing-over control wheel to him, then, with my side cabin window full down I stretched outside in the strong propeller stream and forward just far enough so the aft cowl fastener could be relatched with my fingertips. With things now quieted down, we flew around for several minutes to calm our jangled nerves and prepare for the first use of our night water landing system.

With the bright lights of town, and by utilizing the beam from our single landing light, it was possible to approach the lake's shoreline very low; from which position our line of

flares ahead looked beautiful. But it turned out we had positioned the flares too close to shore and they were also set much too close together, because by the time we had descended from treetop height to a few feet above the surface, they had skimmed beneath us and were far behind. Ahead on the lake it became suddenly very dark, but fortunately there was plenty of smooth water still under us and a slow controlled descent with a small amount of power put us gently down and with much room to spare.

Some repositioning of flares, then a few more trials and we had ourselves a good and workable system, but we found few people really interested in night seaplane rides and in a few weeks we gave it up.

One March night a whistling norther practically blew the covers from our beds and my first thought was the seaplane as I hollered to Barb. The two of us sped to the lake, zipping pants and buttoning shirts. In the beam of our headlights as we swung the car toward the mooring area, we could see the Waco hobbyhorsing badly as she crashed into large white-capping waves. Despite lift-destroying spoilers which were tied every night along the upper surfaces of the lower wing panels, she was half flying and had already dragged her heavy moorings a considerable distance toward shore. One of her restraining bridle ropes had parted and dangled free.

I kicked off my shoes, dove in and waded to her in the waist deep waves. Her wild plunging made it very difficult to get aboard, but once there I quickly threw off the engine covers, climbed in and started her up. Then, for the next two hours, to keep her from lifting into flight and to keep the mooring from dragging ashore, she was literally flown at the end of her one remaining bridle rope. I was scared for her.

The waves, as the dim light of dawn crept over the low gray sky, were big and carried much weight, and the wind streaked them and blew spin-drift from their crests as

the float bows smashed heavily into them and the prop rang from their impacts. It was cold and I was alone. Barb, sitting in the car, watched anxiously. The norther moaned around her, and buffeted her, and shook her, the shifting winds hitting her first from one side, then the other, as northers tend to do, and it tried to get under her wings to lift her, so it could dash her through the surf and smash her into the swaying palm trees behind. I fought the buffeting wind and waves with the Waco's flight controls and propeller thrust. I couldn't take off with her and put her in her own element, flying her out of the pounding waves, because I just couldn't leave the flight controls long enough to slide out the lower wing spars to remove the lift destroying spoilers, nor could I, single-handed, remove the one still-intact mooring line.

In a couple of hours the strong frontal passage winds diminished a bit as the storm moved rapidly out to sea. There was now sufficient light, and Barb was able to wade out and release her. We then taxied and crabbed her slowly, pitching and bucking, through the white-capping waves, across the lake to a protected corner. Peg, who had been worried about us, hitched a ride to the lakefront in the dawn with a milkman making early deliveries. She met us on the distant shore as we tied up after our long taxi. We watched her there all that day and all the next night as the norther gradually blew itself out.

In the early spring, we flew the Waco back north, retracing our route along the seaboard, across Pennsylvania and New York, to the St. Lawrence River and the Thousand Islands. There we worked her up onto a ramp just below our camp's front porch and then spent many relaxing days in fine spring weather getting her ready for a summer of hard work. It was pleasant being back with friends and in familiar surroundings. In June, we were presented with a bouncing baby boy, Charles Scott.