

EAA534

LEE SBURG
FLORIDA

APRIL 2008

MARCH MEETING - Minnesota pilot- and snowbird- Dr. George Erickson



Photo- WSchulz

(left) gave a Power Point presentation based on his best seller, *True North: Exploring the Great Wilderness by Bush Plane*, which recounts his forty summers of flying in northern Canada and Alaska. Photos from the air of beautiful but foreboding landscapes, lakeside campsites beside his beached floatplane, pictures of abandoned bellied-in planes, wildlife, they were all there in glorious color. A book signing and CD sale followed the presentation, with the proceeds going to the Young Eagles.



Photo- WSchulz

SUN-N-FUN - A contingent from EAA534 attended the fly-in and **John Weber** kindly furnished the aircraft pictures seen throughout this issue of the newsletter.



UPCOMING MEETINGS - **APRIL**-- EAA534 member **Jack Freer**, a retired ATP "pressure tube driver," will regale us with recollections of his long career "in the system." This is a "must" for anyone interested in commercial aviation back before it became just another "cram 'em in" bus



Photo- J. Weber

system in the sky, you know, back when you got a smile from the "stew," a drink, and more than just a bag of peanuts! (Heck, in '64 Olympic Airways was handing out cigarettes... not those scrawny little "5-packs," either, whole packs! My, how times have changed... in more ways than one! Ed.) **MAY**-- EAA534's Annual field trip to **Jim Kimball Enterprises'** facilities down Zellwood way to see what's new-- or being made new again-- in aviation at this world-renowned facility. A "do not miss" event.



A MOST UNUSUAL STORY Charlie Brown was a B-17 Flying Fortress pilot with the 379th Bomber Group at Kimbolton, England. His B-17 was called 'Ye Old Pub' and was in a terrible state, having been hit by flak and fighters. The compass was damaged and they were flying deeper over enemy territory instead of heading home to Kimbolton. After flying over an enemy airfield, a German pilot named Franz Steigler was ordered to take off and shoot down the B-17. When he got near the B-17, he could not believe his eyes. In his words, he 'had never seen a plane in such a bad state'. The tail and rear section was severely damaged, and the tail gunner wounded. The top gunner was all over the top of the fuselage. The nose was smashed and there were holes everywhere. Despite having ammunition, Franz flew to the side of the B-17 and looked at Charlie Brown, the pilot. Brown was scared and struggling to control his damaged and blood-stained plane. Aware that they had no idea where they were going, Franz waved at Charlie to turn 180 degrees. Franz escorted and guided the stricken plane to and slightly over the North Sea towards England. He then saluted Charlie Brown and turned



away, back to Europe.

When Franz landed he told the C/O that the plane had been shot down over the sea, and never told the truth to anybody. Charlie Brown and the remains of his crew told all at their

briefing, but were ordered never to talk about it. More than 40 years later, Charlie Brown wanted to find the Luftwaffe pilot who saved the crew. After years of research, Franz was found. He had never talked about the incident, not even at post-war reunions. They met in the USA at a 379th. Bomber Group reunion, together with 25 people who are alive now - all because Franz never fired his guns that day. Research shows that Charlie Brown

lived in Seattle and Franz Steigler had moved to Vancouver, BC after the war. When they finally met, they discovered they had lived less than 200 miles apart for the past 50 years!



Photo- J. Weber

THIS 'N THAT BY OL' 'WHAT'S HIS NAME' - FIRST RIDE--



The din of sixty-five wild Continental horses cannot drown out the rumble of the tires trying to pound adult fist-size stones into the ground of the new airport. Oh, no, there's the distinctive fan-shape of a tall and stately American Elm straight ahead and it's getting larger by the second. All is finished! My life is over at the ripe old age of eleven as we rush to my doom!

It's Columbus Day, 1946. In the front seat of this brand new Aeronca 7AC "Champion" is William Bohlke, owner of the newly built grass strip just east of Spring Valley, New York. Pop, Mom, Gramps, my sister, Ann, and I had been out for an holiday afternoon ride in our war-weary '37 Buick "Special" on this brisk Fall day when we came upon this field only about seven miles from our home across the line in New Jersey. It was newly carved out of a farm which had partially overgrown, probably when the farmer had gone off to fight totalitarian "crazies" in the war which ended just about a year ago. I stood mesmerized by the sight of a real airplane, mere feet from where I stood.

I was only vaguely aware of my parents buzz-buzzing somewhere behind me but when Pop came up, put his hand on my shoulder and asked



Photo- WSchulz



Photo- J. Weber

if I'd like to go for a plane ride, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. On the one hand, the very thought of the thrill of it made me want to shout "YES!" On the other hand, the very thought of the thrill of it made me want to shout "NO!" I stammered out in the affirmative.

Many years later I learned that I was among the vanguard of those who came through this very aero patch, some who made a far greater mark in the history books than I did. These included two-time Academy Award winning actor Burgess Meredith, small- and big-screen actor Wally Cox ("Mr. Peepers"), and former "Today Show" anchor, Frank Blair. These, and many others earned their wings under the tutelage of Mr. Bohlke, most probably logging at least some time in this very same "Air-knocker," November Charlie eight five one niner three. As of 2008, this bird is still on the FAA Register and appears to be based only thirty-four miles from its original home.

Bill Bohlke went on to fly a Piper PA22 "Tri-Pacer" as an air taxi back and forth to New York City. Times Square lay just twenty-five miles to the south-southeast and either LaGuardia in Flushing, Long Island, or Teterboro across the river in New Jersey, were a short ride by taxi, bus, or subway from Midtown Manhattan and a flight to Spring Valley was just a short hop by air from either. However, the ride, by car or bus was the better part of two hours in pre-expressway days. Bohlke went on to found his own commuter and cargo airline, flying DC-3s and C-46s in the Caribbean starting in 1959. His son, Bill, Jr., and grandson, William R., carry on the business. (<http://www.bohlke.com/>)

The thirty-one year old master of this magical yellow and orange ship eased back on the control stick and "poof," we were up and over the elm with the ease of Tinker Bell flitting about on the big screen. I was to live! The flight itself apparently did not impress me as I can't recall details... perhaps I was trying to get my cardio-pulmonary system back into normal rates. At any rate, the effort was for naught as we were soon looking at the tree again, only this time from across one of the biggest barns I had ever seen. The "captain" came in above the barn, turned the plane sideways so it dropped like a rock! Then he straightened it out and we settled, feather-like, onto the "potato patch" of freshly graded and seeded "runway."

And it was over. Well, sort of, for well better than six decades later I can still feel the texture of the seats and smell the mixture of aircraft dope and gasoline, and hear and feel the grumbling of the wheels as they reluctantly try to beat up the stones on the field. I've since learned the theory for gaining flying speed and slipping in over the apparently CAA-mandated fifty-foot obstacles at each end of a runway. Oh, and I also found that the barn wasn't all that big as can be seen in the accompanying picture with this wavy-haired (boo-hoo!) youngster perched nervously in the rear seat of marvelous little **NC85193**. **NEXT— SECOND RIDE!**

== ITEMS FOR SALE ==

GPS- Lowrance 2000 Brand new. Never used but "played with" once. With original packaging. \$700. Also, a late **1800s Doctor's Buggy**. Restored. Contact Don Kosmin @ 352.326.5204

Hangars For Sale and For Rent at the Florida Flying Gator's Airpark. More information about our Airpark location can be found at this link:

<http://www.flyinggators.com/news/hangars/hangars.htm>



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