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FLIGHT THROUGH THE DISTANT PAST - FLEET MODEL 7 AIRCRAFT

Registration number 788 Victor

-continued from last month's issue

I lean against the fuselage and relieve my bursting bladder, with a stream that seems to run on for an interminable time. At last my legs stop their involuntary jerking and the pucker factor fades away. This day I learn a powerful lesson about flying above clouds without proper instruments, but with monumental good fortune I have survived to fly again.

Now the rain has stopped and I remove my gear from the front cockpit. It takes but a minute to make a peanut-butter sandwich and I finish lunch with an apple. I talk to myself and jump about while considering my good fortune. On conclusion of my meal, a battered pickup truck drives up, and from the ranchhand driver I verify my position as close to my intended track. He provides me with a cup of hot coffee from his thermos jug and we banter back and forth about the merits of farming verses flying for a living. He gives me the general direction to a main highway that runs into Crestview, Florida and I am soon airborne for the short flight on into the city airport.

V - AUGUST 28th - Takeoff is soon after dawn and I am on my way to Mobile, Alabama. Unfortunately during the previous night the rain has commenced again and I soon find myself unsure of my position as forward visibility is once again restricted to a few hundred yards. I fly a compass heading due west and after an hour, once again lost in the rain, the main railroad line west appears out of the gloom. Thereafter I fly down the "iron compass" crossing the upper reaches of Mobile Bay flying a few hundred feet above the train bridge. Once reaching land on the far side I soon locate Mobile airport and am on the ground a few minutes later. The total flight time for the leg Crestview to Mobile is only one hour and forty-five minutes but I decide to quit for the day. After a little discussion with the local fixed base airport manager I am offered another empty hanger for use until the following morning. Although it is not yet noon I spread out my sleeping bag on the hanger floor and sleep for several hours. Dreams with bad endings flow through my mind and this causes me to wake with sudden starts now and again. Fatigue from the struggle to combat the ever present foul weather is taking its toll on my mind and body. Later, after arising, I meet a fellow pilot who helps me try to isolate the leaks that continues to plague my ignition system. That evening my new acquaintance and his wife invite me to their house for a southern home cooked dinner. What a treat after damp bread and peanut butter. The day of rest and the wonderful food puts my spirits back on a high road and I return to my guest hanger for a long night of sleep.

VI - SUN AT LAST - The morning of August 29th, 1953 I awake with the sun streaming through cracks in the hanger doors. At last, I think, my troubles are over. Now flight across the green fields, rivers, and

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lakes of Alabama and Louisiana are a pure joy. I chase a big black hawk over an open field, fly a couple of low tight circles around some children playing in a country school yard as we wave back and forth. I feel pure joy as I lean way back against the headrest, then turn my head upward and to the right. In this position no part of the aircraft is within my peripheral vision and the sensation of magic flight through space without visual means of support is exhilarating. I straighten out and fly on to Hammond, Louisiana to refuel before flight onward to Opelousas, Louisiana for a total flight time of three hours and forty five minutes.

VII - THE BLUE NORTHERN - Before departure from Opelousas I compute my flight time onward to Lufkin, Texas to take two hours and five minutes. I complete my pre-flight inspection and am airborne in the early afternoon. The trip is uneventful as I fly over desolate country. Not an inviting place to make a forced landing as the hard scrubland country is dotted with a profusion of small stunted pines. The air is fresh and clear and I can see an occasional road and small town that make my visual navigation an easy task.

Far in the distance, off to the northwest toward the city of Dallas I can just make out a line of blue hills that stretch from horizon to horizon. I travel on but something stirs in the back of my mind that doesn't quite come to the surface. Ten minutes further on and the blue ridge line grows alarmingly larger. Then its significance becomes apparent to me. There are no mountains or even hills in this part of Texas, I'm looking into the face of a huge ugly onrushing squall line. My first thought is to turn 180 degrees of heading and hope to outrun the storm back to Opelousas, but on further consideration I realize that the fuel remaining will not allow this return flight. There is no way that I will be able to negotiate through the weather ahead so it is imperative to find a place to land within a few short minutes.

Off to my right I can see what looks to be a small cultivated field and I roll into a steep bank and head directly toward this clearing. Down through the pine woods that border it on all four sides is a small rectangle of some sort of low green crop. As I sweep across the field, it appears to be without ditches and I decide to land diagonally to give myself a little extra landing area. The wind on the surface is increasing as testified by telltale bursts of dust that blow off the dry dirt road that leads off through the woods. I fly down wind, turn base leg, pull on the carburetor heat and then roll into my final approach. With the throttle retarded the engine slows to a gentle rumble as I cross a fence corner headed into the wind.

With a swish the aircraft stalls and rolls forward with the sound of foliage whipping through the undercarriage. Before reaching a complete stop the addition of power moves me to the opposite corner of the field. With a heavy foot on the left brake and the addition of a burst of engine power the biplane pivots around with the tail facing the fence corner. Now there is no time to waste, the engine is still ticking to a stop as I climb over the side with tie down ropes in hand. I push the plane back until the tail is almost touching the corner of the fence line. Fortunately the tie-down ropes are long enough to secure each wing tip to a fence post and the tail-wheel to some of the fence hog wire. This takes about ten minutes and the wind is now increasing to a low howl. Off to the north-west the onrushing squall line is providing a spectacular sight with its vertical wall of vapor twist, thousands of feet high and its overhang now blotting out the sun. Lightning slashes both vertically and horizontally and in moments the rain starts to fall in torrents as I rush to tie my cockpit covers in place. With the roar and boom of thunder overhead I take cover under the wing but it's already too late as I'm soaked to the skin.

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You can now access the mailing and phone list of your fellow Clipper Pioneers. Go to the Clipper Pioneer website - www.clipperpioneers.com - and scroll down to the bottom of the home page. Click on "Members Only" - when the password box pops up, type in username & password found in your newsletter. You will be able to access the current list of names, address, phone #s, and email addresses there.

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Out of the wind and rain there arrives a dilapidated model A Ford with two occupants blurred behind the cars' swinging windshield wiper. They open a side gate to the field and walk over through the pouring rain as if this is a common occurrence. I climb out from under the wing expecting to get a verbal blasting for destroying a swath of their bean patch but instead I receive a friendly greeting. The newcomers look like a couple right out of a photo of migrants during the Great Depression. They are not concerned about the damage to their beans but that I should get in their car and ride to their home to get out of the downpour. I join them and before we have driven a mile the last of the squall-line sweeps past and the sun beats down with an intensity that sends up mists of vapor off the wet dirt track that we follow through the piney woods. We arrive at a shack with a pronounced lean and a rusty corrugated roof. As the storm is past we sit in the sun and dry off in front of the weather beaten porch.

My benefactor lights his pipe and we swap stories of our life experiences. He had left this back country in 1943 to be an infantry rifleman in Europe and at wars' end was content to return to the girl he left behind. From inside the house I could hear her singing as she prepared us a dinner of wild turkey, turnip greens, and homemade bread. It is a pleasure to see the harmony between the two of them. I think it is surprising that there are no children about the house but decide not to ask as there might be some tragedy involved. He invites me to spend the night and I am happy to accept as it is getting late in the day. We drive back to the aircraft to retrieve my sleeping bag and shaving gear and he explains that this area is called Ora, Texas. It is not to be found on my map but the hospitality of these two people makes it a fine place to know. After a filling meal and a small swig from his jug of home made "white lightning" I bed down for the night on the bare earth floor in front of their old Franklin wood stove. They soon retire to a little alcove off the main area that serves as their bedroom. I am startled in the night when without warning their old hound dog comes in and lies up close to me for his nights' rest.

In the morning after cleaning up with cold water from a bucket, we have a hot meal of cornbread and eggs, the surplus being thrown to my friend the dog that hangs about close by my feet. I have a strong suspicion that I am infested with fleas but it is only in my mind as no bites appear. The owner invites me to go poaching deer with him but I am anxious to get back in the air and on my way west. We three pile into their old car and are soon bouncing back to my makeshift airfield. I offer to give each of them a ride but they are not about to fly in that "contraption" as she calls it. I do finally talk the wife into getting into the front seat for a few moments as she has never been near an airplane previously.

Before takeoff I pace the perimeter of the field and discover it to be six hundred feet square, thus by taking off diagonally I gain an additional two hundred plus feet of runway. This would normally be more than adequate, but with the drag of trashing through the beans I will be glad for the extra run available. After removing the tie-downs and completing my preflight I am soon ready for engine start. The husband holds the tail while I start the engine and return to the cockpit. As soon as I am airborne I head east for a short distance, then roll into a steep turn to recross the little bean patch at an altitude that I guess to be seven or eight hundred feet. I see their upturned faces as I slam the stick and rudder hard to produce a double snaproll before continuing on westward into the rising sun. After a short flight I am down in Lufkin, Texas for refuel and another wonderful peanut-butter sandwich. Navigation is no longer a problem as I fly through clear skies. I cross the Trinity river on flight plan, this event is followed by overheading the town of Buffalo and then on to Waco, Texas for another restroom and fuel stop. I set my ships course for Goldthwaite for fuel and then down for the night in San Angelo. I'm pleased to note that this is my best day

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Be sure to check out "The Maiden of Maiden Flights" slideshow on our website (www.clipperpioneers.com) in the right-hand column - the old photos are amazing - from a bygone era!!

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for distance since the start of my trip. The days flight time adds up to five hours and fifteen minutes in the air and about nine hours since I left my friends in Ora.

Later in the cold night air I look up from my sleeping bag and study the stars in the dark sky. Orion, Big and Little Dipper and other stars, that I learned in my navy celestial navigation days, pass across the arc of night. I daydream of the stories I have read of the old barn stormers who had passed this way before me. With that feel of contentment that comes with success I will soon be fast asleep in preparation for another early morning departure. The next day is the first of September and after a withered apple and more of that wonderful peanut butter spread on stale bread I'm ready to roll by seven AM.

The flight onward from San Angelo is over beautiful green farm lands along the Middle Concho river. Then gradually as the miles flow past the earth below turns to sparse sandy hills as I approach Wink for the aircraft to be refreshed with more aviation fuel. Halfway between Wink and El Paso, Texas I cross the Great Divide as I penetrate through the Guadalupe Pass that cuts through the Delaware Mountains. My old Kinner engine is turning at a steady beat as we climb upward through the cool mountain air. Guadalupe peak is 8,749 feet which makes it the highest point in the state of Texas. Guadalupe Pass is 5,288 feet and I estimate that I must be cruising through in the region at 7,000 feet with the high bulk of the mountain off to my right. My aircraft pitches and rolls in the choppy air as I penetrate the pass. Down below I have been studying the small town of Pine Springs when without warning another light aircraft flying the opposite direction flashes past not more than one hundred feet offset from my flight path. This event gives me one hell of a start and I wonder if the other pilot has even seen me, his face is looking straight ahead as he whizzes past. Over my shoulder I watch him become a tiny spot before disappearing into the distance. Next stop will be El Paso for the usual fuel and amenities and I put the thought of a near miss out of my mind for the present. I'm sure that tonight lying in my sleeping bag, I'll realize again the good luck that rides with me on this trip. Once through the pass, the landscape ahead turns lunar as I pass over salt flats and rough rocky patches of hill country. Two hours and twenty five minutes out of Wink I climb down from my machine at the El Paso municipal airport.

Thirty minutes later I am in my takeoff roll when a large tumbleweed comes bouncing across my takeoff path. Upon liftoff there is a strange whistle that does not sound like the usual wind through the rigging and I realize that the tumbleweed has lodged in my undercarriage. In a few moments I'm back on the ground removing the debris before once again climbing out on my westward journey. In the late afternoon the turbulence becomes heavy and I bounce and sway while on the horizon dust filled whirlwinds play around the horizon. Dog tired I glide down for landing in Lordsburg, New Mexico. I climb out of the cockpit stiff and sore after six and one half hours in the air. My face burns from the wind and sun, while my head buzzes from the all day roar of the open exhaust stacks located a few feet forward of my open cockpit. I almost wish for the damp cool air that covered Florida and Alabama that I traversed just a few days past. As time moves on, how fast we blot out fears of the past.

This night there is a celebration. A barbecue is in progress on the airfield and with good fortune I'm invited for steak, salad, and a beer which is almost magical food after another day of peanut butter and stale bread. I think I am developing a life long aversion to the smell of smashed peanuts.

Later I lay out my sleeping bag under the wing of my tied down aircraft and marvel at yet another brilliant star filled night sky. With my hands folded under my head for a pillow I seem to be floating in space, which brings back a harvest of memories from "Wind, Sand, and Stars", Antoine Saint Exupery's desert flying experiences.

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It's the morning of September the 2nd, 1953 as I awake with the sun, in the crisp mountain air of Lordsburg and prepare for my flight onward to Tucson, Arizona. I check the aircraft fluids and then clean my cockpit windshield. This chore is becoming easier as the amount of grease flying out of the rocker-boxes decreases as I approach the twenty five hour limit to refill time. Unfortunately as the level of grease drops the temperature of the valve guides and rocker arms increases and I begin to be concerned that with the increase in outside air temperature there may be engine trouble ahead. This morning I rebel against more peanut butter and settle for two of my dwindling supply of apples for my breakfast. Within the hour of arising I'm airborne for Tucson. The country that I fly through becomes more rugged and so I decide to follow the main highway through the mountains. San Simon, Bowie, Willcox, Cochise, and Benson pass under my wings as the two hour and ten minute flight time nears its end. Just prior to arrival in Tucson my flight path takes me just south of the great air corps storage base of Davis-Monthan. Down below in the desert sun hundreds of silent World War Two bombers. B17s, B24s, B25s and others are lined up wingtip to wingtip waiting their fate in the post war world of America. Another twenty minutes of flight and I descend to land on Tucson municipal airport. The sun beats down on the asphalt tarmac and the heat waves bounce up making the horizon waver in distortion. Soon the metal parts of the biplane become uncomfortable to the touch and I hurry to complete my refuel and aircraft checks. I take a long drink from a garden hose that is located behind the gas pump station. Now I begin to wish for a canteen but I have neither the time or money to obtain one and consider that the short flight time on to Casa Grande can be accomplished without another drink.

VIII - THE CULPRIT IS HEAT - It takes just fifty minutes of flight down the highway to reach Casa Grande and I feel confident that if I should have engine trouble a forced landing would be a short walk to the main highway and assistance. I encounter no problem and make the transit in a few minutes over the forecast flight time. The increased heat and the inhospitable land over which I am flying begins to have a sobering effect on my outlook. Once down in Casa Grande I decide that some sort of drinking water supply is necessary for my ongoing flight. In a few minutes I locate an empty glass apple juice jug in a waste can behind the tee hangers. This I rinse, fill, and stopper with a wine bottle cork wrapped with a clean handkerchief to make it fit. With these preparations I am ready to make my longest hop since leaving Mile Branch airport in Florida. My estimated flight time will be two hours and forty five minutes on to Blythe, California located just west of the Colorado River.

The problem that concerns me is that I will be flying a compass heading out across a waste land of rocky ridges and sage brush valleys without checkpoints until I locate the main highway from Phoenix that runs due west into California. I complete my refuel and checks and then fix a peanut butter sandwich. The bread has become so stale and dry it resembles hardtack but with my hunger it doesn't taste all that bad. Once again I take a long drink of water and then stow my apple juice jug full of emergency water in the forward cockpit inside my rolled sleeping bag. The air is stifling hot and as soon as I'm in the air I start a slow climb in the hope that with a little more altitude the air will cool down to a comfortable level. There are many peaks and ridges that show an elevation of three thousand plus feet on my chart so it is necessary to keep climbing in order to have plenty of obstacle clearance and to provide forward visibility in my search for the highway that runs west out of Phoenix.

The air is a little cooler as I level off and continue my west-north-west heading. Two hours airborne and I am crossing the Eagletail Mountains when with out warning the engine starts to miss-fire and jerk about in its mounts. I immediately pull back the throttle to reduce power and the engine smoothes out. After waiting a few minutes I increase the power and in moments the engine starts to misfire with the resultant pow-pow and heavy shaking. Again I am forced to reduce power and the engine runs smooth once again.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Pan Am Houston Area Reunion

The Pan Am Houston Area Reunion will be held at the Kingwood Country Club, in Kingwood, TX on August 7th, 2010, from 10:00 AM until 4:00 PM. A nice lunch will be served. The cost is only \$15 for each person.

For information or an invitation package, contact: Brendan "Tex" Love, 906 N. Campbell St., Willis, TX 77378 ~ 936-856-7329 (Home) - Email: belove@suddenlink.net

75th China Clipper Reunion

Current news about the 75th China Clipper celebration/reunion on how to sign-up, tours and who is attending can be found on the following website: www.china-clipper.com

PAA Reunion

The PAA Reunion will be held on Wednesday, August 11, 2010 at the Mason City Rec Park, Franklin, NC. There will be a noon luncheon / potluck. For information, call James Siletto, 772-340-7783.

Bristol Zoo - *(submitted by Robert Bragg)*

Outside England's Bristol Zoo there is a parking lot for 150 cars and 8 buses. For 25 years, its parking fees were managed by a very pleasant attendant. The fees were 1 for cars (\$1.40), for buses (about \$7).

Then, one day, after 25 solid years of never missing a day of work, he just didn't show up; so the Zoo Management called the City Council and asked it to send them another parking agent.

The Council did some research and replied that the parking lot was the Zoo's own responsibility. The Zoo advised the Council that the attendant was a City employee. The City Council responded that the lot attendant had never been on the City payroll.

Meanwhile, sitting in his villa somewhere on the coast of Spain or France or Italy ... is a man who'd apparently had a ticket machine installed completely on his own and then had simply begun to show up every day, commencing to collect and keep the parking fees, estimated at about \$560 per day — for 25 years.

Assuming 7 days a week, this amounts to just over \$7 million dollars....and no one even knows his name!

Greetings from Hot Virginia,

I'd like to bring to your attention an absolute great book store in London--"MOTOR BOOKS"- They specialize in aviation, ships and cars--They carry a lot of books on Pan Am and aviation in general--I think it would be a great item to include in your news letter--They also have an excellent web site: WWW.motorbooks.co.uk - Address is 33 St. Martin's Court, London, WC2N 4AN - TEL: 44-20-7836-5376, FAX: 44-20-7497-2539. They have 3 floors of book's--I never go to London without visiting.

Best Regards,
Bob Bragg

*...and God will lift you up on Eagle's Wings, bear you on the breath of dawn,
make you to shine like the sun and hold you in the palm of His hand.*

IN MEMORIAM

Retired Pan Am Flight Engineer Robert J. Messler passed away April 29, 2010 at St. Claire's Hospital, Denville, NJ.

John Ferruggio, hero of 1970 Pan Am hijacking, passes at age 84 in Milton, MA, formerly of South Boston, passed away on June 19, 2010 at Milton Hospital of a sudden illness. While working for Pan Am on September 6, 1970 Flight 93 was hijacked; John was considered to be the lead person with saving the lives of 176 people. Read his story at www.clipperpioneers.com/obits/Ferruggio_obit.html

Willis H. Kleven of Chester, Conn. passed away on July 8 2009 at the age of 91. He was a Pan Am flight engineer for 35 years and retired in 1977. Willis flew out of Kennedy Airport and was a crew member of the historic Inaugural Flight non-stop N.Y./ Buenos Aires and Buenos Aires/N.Y. Dec. 5 and 6 1963 5436 miles in 605 minutes. He enjoyed an active life playing golf, fishing and hunting into his 90's.

George Jefferson Price, a Pan Am pilot who flew seaplanes out of Dinner Key during World War II -- and the only civilian aircraft in the 1948 Berlin airlift -- has died at 96 on October 4, 2009. Read his story at: www.clipperpioneers.com/obits/Price_obit.html

Hugh P. Huddleston passed away. No other details are currently available.

Evelyn Maxine Prater, 85, loving wife of Lynn Prater, passed away peacefully on June 26, 2010.

For more information about each of these friends who will be missed, click on "In Memory Of..." at our website: www.clipperpioneers.com. Know of someone from Pan Am who has passed? Email the obit to Jerry Holmes at jerry747@copper.net

Senior Health Tips

Senior Health and Medications

One of the foremost senior health issues of the day is prescription medications. Whether the issue is money or drug interaction, every senior citizen needs to use their head when thinking about medication.

For instance, if your physician prescribes new medications for you, always ask if he has any samples to give you. It's not wise to pay for new medications without knowing you can 'take' them and not have severe side effects. Pharmaceutical companies supply free samples to doctors just for these purposes. Even if getting renewal prescriptions for meds, ask for samples. Make sure your physician knows all of the medication you are taking though, because you want to avoid any drug interaction reactions.

Walking for Senior Health

Here's another senior health care tip. When walking for senior exercise, it is important that you keep a normal stride. Over-extending our stride length jolts our joints and actually slows us down. You may also put stress on your joints and ligaments by trying to go very quickly or by lengthening your stride too much. Take it easy! Studies show that walking is just as effective as running for aerobic exercise. It may take you a bit longer, but then you just have more opportunities to stop and smell the roses!

Predatory Lending

Also known as loan fraud, predatory lending involves a wide array of abusive practices that mortgage brokers, appraisers and home contractors use to take advantage of unsuspecting seniors who are in the market to refinance their homes. Using high-pressure sales pitches, confusing language and elaborate marketing programs, predatory lenders will target senior citizens that are in need of money to consolidate debts or meet an emergency expense, often offering them high-cost and high-fee loans.

According to the Center for Responsible Lending, some of the most common predatory lending practices include:

Excessive Fees

Points and fees are costs not directly reflected in interest rates. Because these costs can be financed, they are easy to disguise. On competitive loans, fees below 1% of the loan amount are typical. On predatory loans, fees totaling more than 5% of the loan amount are common.

Prepayment Penalties

Borrowers with higher-interest subprime loans have a strong incentive to refinance as soon as their credit improves. However, up to 80% of subprime mortgages carry a prepayment penalty – a fee for paying off the loan early.

Kickbacks to Brokers

When a broker delivers a loan with an inflated interest rate, the lender will often pay a "yield spread premium," or kickback, for making the loan more costly to the borrower.

"Flipping"

A lender "flips" a borrower by refinancing a loan to generate fee income without providing any net tangible benefit to the borrower. Flipping can quickly drain borrower equity and increase monthly payments.

Unnecessary Products

Borrowers may pay more than necessary because lenders sell and finance unnecessary insurance or other products along with the loan.

Mandatory Arbitration

Loan contracts may require "mandatory arbitration," meaning that borrowers cannot seek legal remedies in a court if they find that their home is threatened by loans with illegal or abusive terms.

Steering

Predatory lenders may steer borrowers into subprime mortgages. Vulnerable individuals may be subjected to aggressive sales tactics and/or outright fraud.

When in need of a loan, seniors need to be smart consumers. Comparison shopping, taking the time to understand the terms of the loan and seeking the advice of an expert, relative or trusted friend can be the difference between entering a beneficial financial agreement and becoming the victim of a predatory lender.

Upcoming Pan Am Events

If you have an upcoming event you'd like everyone to know about, please send it to us at least a month ahead for the next newsletter. Thanks!