





75th Anniversary of the Piper Cub

Commemorating a general aviation icon

THE PIPER J-3 CUB, THAT (USUALLY) BRIGHT-YELLOW, two-place tandem tube-and-fabric high-wing monoplane that has become an icon of general aviation, marked its seventy-fifth birthday this year. The first J-3 was built in Piper's Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, plant on October 8, 1937, and likely would have made its first half-hour test flight that Friday—or soon thereafter, if it was finished late in the day, said Clyde Smith of Lock Haven, a Piper historian and former employee. ■ That first Piper Cub was more than the first of nearly 20,000 airplanes in the J-3 family (and thousands more high-wing, tube-and-fabric monoplanes of derivative models). It also marked the birth of an iconic manufacturer. William T. Piper had become an investor in the Taylor Aircraft Company, then went on to buy out Gilbert Taylor and rename the company. Today Piper Aircraft, Inc. continues to keep alive Piper's dream that everyone should fly, manufacturing a line of aircraft ranging from piston-engined trainers to high-performance turboprops. ■ Cub owners in particular have been





celebrating all year. In June, dozens of Cubs descended on Lock Haven for the twenty-seventh Sentimental Journey to Cub Haven Fly-In; the J-3 was produced there for 10 years. Just before EAA AirVenture, 85 J-3s—and a number of other vintage Pipers—gathered in Hartford, Wisconsin, for the Cubs 2 Oshkosh commemoration. The first in a flight of 75 Cubs took off from Hartford at 5:56 a.m. July 22 to begin the 39-nautical-mile journey north to Oshkosh, and the seventy-fifth lifted off into the cool Wisconsin morning air at 6:41 a.m.—minutes before the first landed at Wittman Regional Airport. The anniversary celebration concludes November 9 through 11 with the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Fly-In at Piper's Vero Beach, Florida, headquarters and factory.

Every Cub pilot has a story to tell. Les Shannon of Conroe, Texas, finished the final details of his 1941 J-3's restoration literally hours before departing for Wisconsin. Other Cubs were welcomed, as well. Jeff Fontenot trekked to Lock

Haven from Richmond, Texas, in his 65-horsepower Piper PA-11 Cub Special. "It took me about 17 hours over the course of four days," he said—the longest flight he's ever made. Glen Marshall of Capitola, California, made the journey to Hartford in his 1940 Piper J-5A, a three-seat Cub. Marshall flew north to Oregon and then turned east to reach Wisconsin.

On these pages we combine some anecdotes from the aircraft manufacturer's early days with current Cub owners' reflections on their iconic airplanes.

—Mike Collins

Mr. Piper and the J-3

The story behind a legend

BY CHARLES SPENCE

I HAD JUST LIFTED THE PIPER J-3 CUB off the narrow asphalt runway at Zahn's Airport on Long Island. It was my first solo flight. At about 100 feet agl, a flock of birds flew in front of the airplane, so close I feared killing some with the propeller, and feared more what a novice pilot would do after a bird strike. I'd had only nine hours of flight training, for which I had paid \$10 an hour—for both instructor and aircraft. It was an example of what W.T. Piper sought his entire aviation career: low costs to become a pilot. And, it demonstrated the success of his product that for many has become the iconic symbol of general aviation—the Piper J-3 Cub.

Nine years after that flight I had the pleasure, honor, respect, and admiration for knowing Mr. Piper personally, and his sons, when I was hired by the association of manufacturers of light aircraft.

It was always "Mr. Piper." No one other than his closest relatives and friends ever called him by any other name. That was out of respect. He was completely without egotistic pride. He neither drank alcohol nor smoked, and did not curse. His successes and

AT AGE 70 in 1951, Piper President William T. Piper was still flying on company business. Here he is about to deliver a Piper L-21 (a powerful version of the Super Cub) to a U.S. Army base in Fort Sill, Oklahoma.





GREGORY MCKNIGHT

Flying in his father's footsteps

Gregory McKnight of Ottsville, Pennsylvania, flew his 1943 Piper J-3 Cub to Sentimental Journey—an airplane that his father flew in 1946. McKnight searched the FAA aircraft registry online for the registrations of airplanes his father had piloted; located this Cub not far from where he was working at the time; and purchased it from its owner six months later.

The airframe had been stored in a barn, and while it was McKnight's first aircraft restoration project, his handiwork would have made his late father—who had been an airline mechanic—proud. McKnight's airplane was named Grand Champion at the 2011 Sentimental Journey fly-in. His first flight in the airplane was 62 years to the day after his father had flown it. "I got the flight in between two thunderstorms," he said. "It was something I wanted to do."

But the airplane's story doesn't end there. Some unusual serial numbers discovered during the restoration indicated that the airframe originally was built as a Piper TG-8, one of 253 gliders Piper built during World War II to train glider pilots for the D-Day invasion. When it was no longer needed, the airframe was converted to a military L-4, and then certificated as a J-3. Except for squared-off rear windows and a slightly different throttle placement—it's located where the TG-8's towrope release was positioned—the airplane is identical to production Cubs of the era.

—Mike Collins

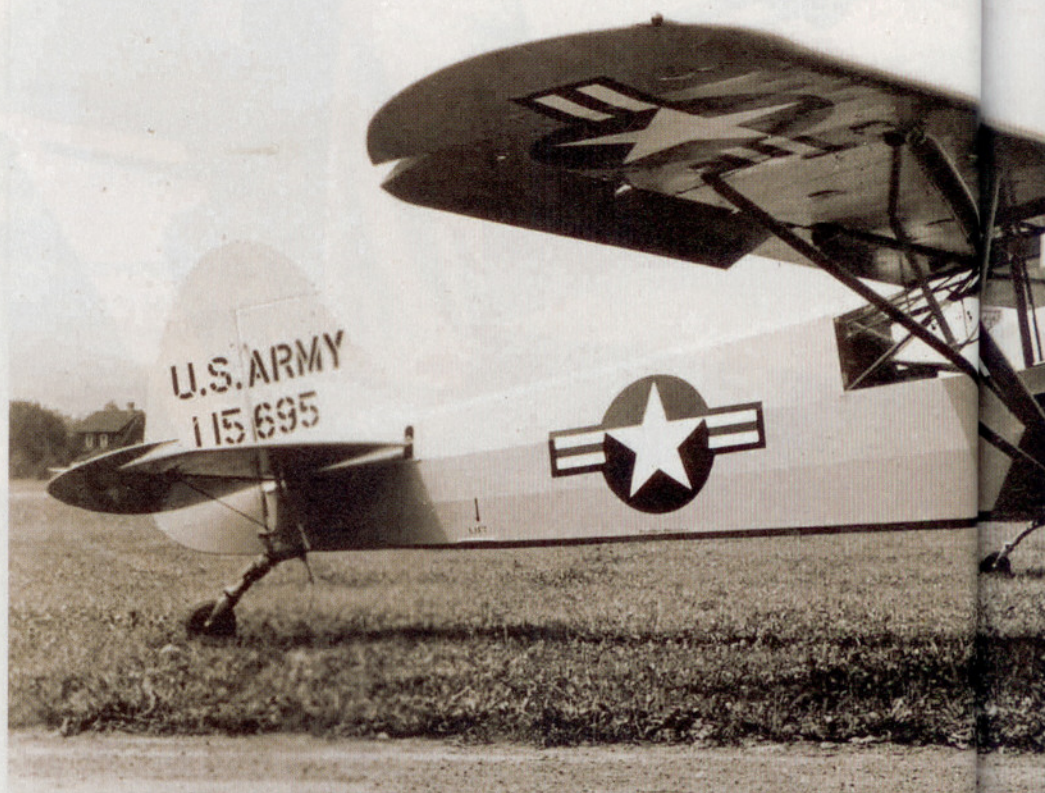


prominence never showed in his business or personal relationships. Unpretentious about his position, he usually walked from his modest home in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, each morning to the aircraft plant—stopping often to chat with friends and employees' families.

One day a distributor arrived at the factory to pick up a new airplane, but it was after hours and the plant was closed. A boy, who was with the distributor, later told his friends that an older man had

met them at the door and showed them through the plant. The boy said it must have been the night watchman. It was Mr. Piper and his unassuming character.

On one occasion, Max Karant, then senior vice president of AOPA, was making an approach into the Lock Haven airport in a Piper Twin Comanche when another Piper aircraft, also approaching, forced him to make a go-around. The pilot of the other airplane was Mr. Piper. Although he was flying one



Mr. Piper was never reticent about admitting mistakes. He once turned down an opportunity to own a half-interest in the Zippo lighter.

of the airplanes his own company made into his own airport, he profusely apologized to Karant in front of many plant workers because he had failed to see the other airplane—and for causing Karant an inconvenience.

Mr. Piper was never reticent about admitting mistakes. A young man, unable to get bank loans to start manufacturing a product he invented, once came to the Piper home seeking a personal loan. “If the banks won’t lend you the money, neither will I,” Mr. Piper told me he said to the man. The stranger then offered to give Mr. Piper half interest in the new company

for a loan of just the few hundred dollars needed. Still, he refused to invest. That product was the Zippo lighter, a hugely successful product, spurred by sales to military personnel in World War II. Mr. Piper often related the story with humor, including a veiled reminder that mistakes are made by all and it’s best not to dwell on them.

Mr. Piper entered the airplane world without even knowing it. A graduate of Harvard, he was a partner in an oil-recovery business in Bradford, Pennsylvania.

WILLIAM T. PIPER JR. with his father William T. Piper Sr. and uncle Howard Piper in the company boardroom in 1968 (left). Piper L-21s were produced for the U.S. Army (below).

When the Bradford Chamber of Commerce was trying to lure the Taylor Aircraft Company plant to town, promoters of the move pushed to get more funds to make sure, if the move was made, the company would be amply financed to keep providing jobs. Offices of one person trying to help Taylor sell more stock were in the same building as Mr. Piper and his partner’s oil-recovery business. The partner purchased \$400 worth of stock and an equal amount for Mr. Piper, who was out of the office at the moment.

Now a bit better financed, the Taylor brothers brought their business to





Bradford. Taylor continued to produce the two-place, high-wing Chummy monoplane, but its price was about \$4,000. The president of the Bradford Chamber of Commerce had been Mr. Piper's commanding officer in the Spanish-American war. (Mr. Piper had fibbed about his age to enlist before finishing high school.) Concerned about the future of the new factory in town, the Chamber head insisted Mr. Piper become a member of Taylor's board of directors.

Now in the airplane business, Mr. Piper devoted more and more time to it and less to the oil-recovery company. He and Taylor sparred, Mr. Piper believing the company needed to produce an inexpensive aircraft to get more of the public involved in aviation and Taylor wanting to keep improving the Chummy—even if it meant higher prices. Despite modest success, the company went bankrupt in 1930 and Mr. Piper was the only bidder on its assets. He bid \$761. Indicative of his character, Mr. Piper gave Taylor half of the business and appointed him chief engineer.

He still wanted an inexpensive airplane to sell to flight instructors, believing



LYNNE AND JIM FINLEY

Family Cub

JIM AND LYNNE FINLEY of New Orleans flew 16 hours over four and a half days to Wisconsin to participate in Cubs 2 Oshkosh. Actually, Jim flew their 1946 J-3 while Lynne drove to haul their luggage. "She had me beat on every leg, except into [Hartford]," Jim said.

The couple owned a Cessna 210 for 30 years, until they sold it two years ago and bought the Cub. "We're not new to the aircraft," Lynne noted. "He trained in a Cub and I trained in a Taylorcraft, so we're home."

"The airplane actually shrank. When I learned to fly in it when I was in college, the cockpit was much larger," Jim laughed. "The Cub brings you back to what flying was all about. It's fun. People come out and talk to you when you land somewhere in a Cub." —Mike Collins

and Taylor continued to disagree. Mr. Piper urged development of a cheaper, bare-minimum aircraft for flight training. Taylor's engineers made a few changes in the E-2 Cub, although what Mr. Piper wanted was still not in the works. He encouraged a young engineer, Walter Jamouneau, to make many more improvements in the E-2. These exceeded Taylor's orders and, in anger, Taylor fired all three of the company's engineers. So, at age 24, Walter Jamouneau became chief engineer. The E-2 Cub became known the J-3 Cub, J for Jamouneau.

Mr. Piper bought out Taylor's half interest in the company, hired back the fired engineers, and the Taylor Aircraft Company became the Piper Aircraft Company. With the Piper J-3 Cub, he had his low-cost aircraft for flight training; at one point the J-3 sold for less than \$1,000.

A fire destroyed the plant in Bradford in 1937, causing some \$200,000 in damage. Insurance covered only about five percent of the loss. Mr. Piper was in California when the fire occurred and was informed by a telephone call. In his usual optimistic attitude he responded, "Well, at least we'll

As dedicated as he was to producing an aircraft in which more pilots could be trained, Mr. Piper was just as dedicated to airport development.

that if persons paid less to learn to fly, more persons would earn a pilot's license. Reluctantly, Taylor went to work on a tandem-seat, low-cost aircraft. Because of an enclosed seating area, occupants could not get in by climbing over the side as they did in open-cockpit aircraft. And the high wing kept a door from swinging open. This was resolved by installing the drop-down side panels.

A two-cylinder, 20-horsepower engine, the Brownback Tiger Kitten, was chosen

for this new product. A name different from Taylor's Chummy was needed and many members of the company attempted to come up with an acceptable one. The company accountant thought about the Tiger Kitten engine he was paying company money for and suggested Cub as the name for the new airplane.

Production and sales of the Taylor E-2 Cub increased. The Taylor Aircraft Company became the leading producer of aircraft in this category. But Mr. Piper

get some free publicity out of it." Lured by Jake Miller—one of his distributors who became marketing director—and the offer of a vacated silk mill, Mr. Piper moved production to Lock Haven, Pennsylvania.

He had his aircraft to sell for inexpensive flight training and sent salesmen off with them to fly from airport to airport until they were sold. They would leave the airplane with the purchaser and return to Lock Haven. Under Mr. Piper's instructions, the salesman would charge extra for



GEORGE W. KIRKENDALL SR. (left) was the first pilot to fly the original Cub. The former chief pilot is shown here with Piper President William T. Piper in 1961.

the compass in the aircraft if the buyer wanted it, or bring it back to the factory.

With war clouds building over Europe, the United States was enlarging its military might, including aviation. This fit perfectly into Mr. Piper's desire for an aircraft to train pilots. The Piper Cub became the airplane for the Civilian Pilot Training Program, which trained pilots while still civilians who could be ready when the United States entered the war. The Piper Corporation proudly boasted that four out of five U.S. pilots in World War II had received their basic training in Piper J-3 Cubs. An officer at a base in Texas, where a Piper salesman had brought a J-3 Cub for demonstration, often borrowed that airplane to fly around for relaxation. The officer, Dwight Eisenhower, went on to become the thirty-fourth U.S. president and the first who was a pilot.

Fast forward nine years after that solo flight in a J-3 Cub on Long Island, when I went to work for the Utility Airplane Council of the Aerospace Industries Association. Piper was one of eight companies that made up this predecessor to the General Aviation Manufacturers Association. Here, I had the good fortune of getting to know well W.T. Piper and his sons.

As dedicated as he was to producing an aircraft in which more pilots could be trained, Mr. Piper was just as dedicated to airport development. During a conversation about the need for airports he said it took more than 50 years for people to realize that you don't put major highways through cities, but around them. He wondered how long it will take the public to know we need airports.

When highways are being constructed, he said, is the time to lay down strips beside the highway near communities and along the route. With all the equipment at hand, cost would be minimal, land acquisition would be completed, flight services could be added as the needs arose, and there would be more landing places for flight emergencies.



TOM BOARDMAN AND ALICIA BRINDISI

Perfect bull's-eye

TOM BOARDMAN of Albany, New York, has had a Cub for six years, but the four-hour flight to Sentimental Journey was his first in the 1939 Cub he had refurbished over the past three years. He decided to enter the bomb drop contest and scored the first perfect bull's-eye at Sentimental Journey—at least, as far as any fly-in volunteers or staff could remember—by dropping a paper bag of flour into a bright pink, three-foot-diameter children's wading pool.

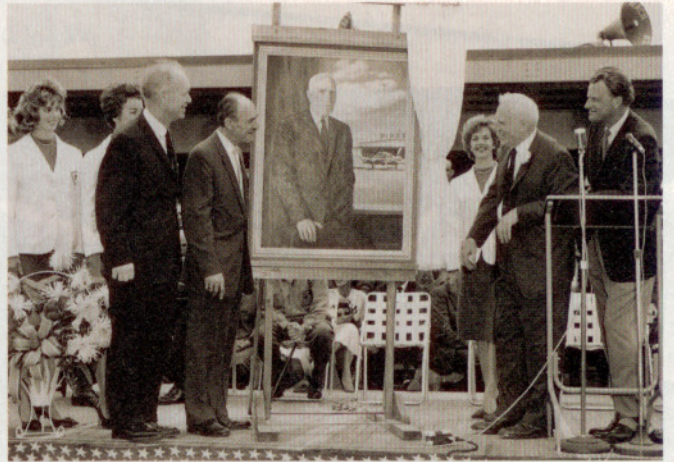
"She gets all the credit," Boardman said of bombardier Alicia Brindisi, of East Haddam, Connecticut. "I was just driving the bus." He said there was a bit of wind from the north, so on his third and final pass, he adjusted his ground track—which made the lineup harder to see. "On the third drop, we both saw it—it was like, 'poof.' Sometimes magic just happens."

"We were screaming," Brindisi added. "It was a beautiful thing to see it fall into that pool. It was like slow motion. There were no two other people who were as surprised as us."

Boardman said they were thinking about just retiring, instead of trying to defend the title next year. While there were no other direct hits, a number of pilots came very close to the target. —Mike Collins



PIPER OPENED its engineering center in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, in 1961 (above). "Mr. Piper" was honored in 1961—along with his family; that's Rev. Billy Graham on the far right (above right).



His dedication to airport development was known to many. In 1967, a

new airport was planned at Brockport, New York. A local teacher and pilot decided to build the airport and gain support by stressing it could be ready in a day. At two minutes to seven the first engine of a road grader started. Volunteers worked with it and other equipment to clear the brush and grade the strip. Mr. Piper had been invited to be the first person to use the new airport. At 6:15 p.m., a Piper Navajo with Mr. Piper aboard touched down on the dusty strip. Workers welcomed him and he personally thanked them for their efforts. He welcomed the publicity for airport development that the building stunt brought.

That airport and a few others started with proponents gaining information from a Grow Kit produced by the Utility Airplane Council. This package of basic planning and promotion material was one of the programs undertaken by the UAC after sales slumped following the post-war boom. I had been hired to develop the \$150,000-per-year program to get better public acceptance for general aviation. Mr. Piper and his son Bill Piper Jr., who by this time had taken over many of the company duties, eagerly supported the entire program, even quietly urging more joint effort to get more people to train as pilots and to build more airports.



TADD GARCIA

Back to basic flying

Tadd Garcia flew his 1946 J-3 Cub to Sentimental Journey from Pittsburgh. It was the airline pilot's third visit to the Sentimental Journey. "I bid for vacation this week every year," he said. A pilot since 2000, he's owned the Cub a little more than two years. "I wanted to go back to basic flying. We're flying these things with automated everything, and I liked the idea of going back to a basic airplane."

Garcia flies the Cub 75 to 100 hours per year. "I just like cruising around on a nice, smooth evening with the window open," he said. "Gas is still expensive, but at least this airplane makes it somewhat manageable." —Mike Collins

Others did not agree. The joint industry program was discontinued after a year and a half. In dealings with competitors, Mr. Piper maintained the same modest, nonaggressive, frank, and honest attitude that distinguished him in other business and personal activities.

Walter Jamouneau, under Mr. Piper and his sons' direction, continued to make improvements in the Cub. There were added pressures to build other aircraft to sell to the increasing market for personal and business aircraft. Even as these new single- and multiengine models were brought into the market, Mr. Piper still had his Cub for training.

To much of the world, the Piper Cub is the name by which noncommercial flight is known. Late in his life, Mr. Piper was being interviewed for a story. The interviewer commented that just as Henry Ford had produced a low-cost Model T to make automobiles more easily available and revolutionize transportation, Mr. Piper had done much the same for aviation.

"Does it bother you to be called the Henry Ford of aviation?" the interviewer asked.

"No," Mr. Piper responded, "but I'd rather that Mr. Ford was known as the William Piper of automobiles." **AOPA**

CHARLES SPENCE was vice president of public relations for AOPA from 1968 to 1983. He has been flying for more than 50 years.



Cross-country in a Piper Cub

Cold hands, warm hearts, and a Piper Cub love affair

BY JAMIE BECKETT

THE COUPLE'S GOAL WAS SIMPLE ENOUGH. Pick up Jim Torphy's Piper Cub from his summer home in Bedford, Indiana, and fly it to his winter residence in Winter Haven, Florida. VFR all the way. Easy peasy, lemon squeezy. Nothing to it.

This is no simple story of a cross-country flight. This is an epic journey through an aviator's life that leads from the heart of the Midwest, rockets into outer space, and ultimately splashes down in the subtropical warmth of central Florida.

THE LEGACY

At 89 years old, Jim Torphy casts a shadow far larger than his slender physique might suggest. The man is a piece of work, in the classic American sense of the term.

In his younger years he owned and operated Torp Aero, a diverse general aviation business based in Bloomington, Indiana. It was there that Torphy taught untold numbers of pilots how to apply pitch and power to make the airplane do what they wanted it to. Along the way he became a designated examiner. Torphy established relationships with his students and the applicants who came to him with sweaty palms, fluttering bellies, and high hopes. He bonded with his customers and turned them into friends.

In recent years he can be found keeping company with the pilots and visitors in and around the

operations center at Jack Brown's Seaplane Base, in Winter Haven. Until two years ago he was still actively instructing. Then at 87 he decided it might be time to slow down a little. His skills are still with him, though, and his knowledge remains deep and impressive.

Among Torphy's personal treasures is a signed photograph and an email sent by a former customer, Ken Bowersox. Today, both the photo and the email hang on the wall of the briefing room at the seaplane base. The inscription on the photo reads: "Jim, good thing you passed me on my private pilot checkride back in 1975 or I'd never have gotten to do this landing." The email is similarly pedestrian. Not much more than a howdy-do from an old friend, really. What makes them such valued keepsakes is that the aircraft in the photo is a space shuttle, snapped just as the gear touches down on the runway. Bowersox



JIM TORPHY and his Piper J-3 Cub.



STEVE AND JO ALCORN on a cold winter day in the Cub.



was piloting that particular spacecraft. The email was sent while Bowersox was at work—on the International Space Station. He wrote Torphy from space, while he was in orbit more than 200 miles above the surface of the Earth.

THE FLIGHT CREW

Steve and Jo Alcorn are the sort of couple Hollywood dreams it could make movies about. It's clear at a glance that they deeply enjoy each other's company. Their enthusiasm for flight and life in general is infectious.

Like Bowersox, Steve Alcorn flew with Jim Torphy at an impressionable age, and that experience set him on a career path that he is still pursuing to this day. "When I was seventeen I did my [private pilot] checkride with this man," says Alcorn. A year later they did a commercial checkride together.

A successful businesswoman, Jo Alcorn came into aviation as something of a second career. Today she flies often, and competes in events such as the Air Race Classic. This annual event allows Jo and a team member to guide her 1997 Cessna 172R across a wide

swath of North America in a days-long contest of planning, precise execution, and speed.

THE EQUIPMENT

The airplane to be ferried south is a 1946 Piper J-3 Cub. It's more or less stock, as it came from the factory 66 years ago. Consequently, there is a distinct lack of high-tech gadgetry in the panel and no hint of plush finery in the cockpit. The engine packs a meager 65 horsepower. There is no electrical system—so there is no starter, no lights, no radio, and no intercom.

"The communication is hysterical," says Jo. The pair adapted to a system of conversation that was as simple as the Cub itself—they just yelled back and forth over the noise of the engine.

From the moment they left Virgil I. Grissom Municipal Airport in Bedford, Indiana, Steve and Jo were committed to a long VFR flight that was reminiscent of the way air travel worked 60-plus years ago. Their one concession to the modern age was a handheld GPS unit borrowed from a friend. The plan was to use the GPS to get an accurate read on their groundspeed, which was

THE ROUTE



especially important for such a long trip over mostly rural territory, where airports are not plentiful and opportunities to fuel up are not universally available.

"We really didn't need the GPS," Steve joked, "we needed a calendar." Headwinds on the November trip drove their ground-speed down into the neighborhood of 50 miles per hour for much of the flight. Excessive speed is not an attribute the Cub is known for, but this trip was especially slow—even by Cub standards.

THIRTEEN STOPS, LOTS OF WAITING

The Cub is famous for a wide-open cabin that results from having a door and window that can be latched open even in cruise flight. That feature provides an expansive unobstructed view for those who are lucky enough to be aboard. Jim, Steve, and Jo all live in central Florida these days, where balmy temperatures make flying with the door open a year-round treat. However, that wasn't the case for a flight departing Indiana in late November, when temperatures hover around the freezing mark. Add to that meteorological challenge the task of sitting still for three days on a vinyl-covered seat, in an airplane that can be generously described as somewhat drafty.

Steve and Jo departed a chilly Bedford on a southerly heading. The plan was to make their first refueling stop in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Unfortunately, the winds aloft had a different idea. "We were creeping," Steve says.

Their alternate became Breckinridge County Airport in Hardinsburg, Kentucky. A nontowered field with a single 3,500-foot runway, the Alcorns found little to remedy their dilemma on the ground. The place was deserted. "There wasn't even an old dog," Jo recalls. "There was no fuel, there were no people."

Perseverance paid off, though. After finding some empty fuel cans, the couple found a way to fill them, and in turn fill the Cub so they could continue on their way. The second departure of the day had to wait a bit, however. "We didn't need to stop for fuel," says Steve. "We needed to stop to warm up."

Jo had pulled the cabin heat control on, but found no warm air entering the cockpit. Torphy had disconnected the cabin heater to reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. And why not? He only flies the little yellow airplane in the warmer weather these days.

Bundled up in multiple layers of clothes, Jo found it difficult to move freely. Long johns, a turtleneck, a vest, and two coats all

combined to help ward off the bitter wind blowing through the cockpit—but that same outfit made it difficult for her to board or deplane without a significant effort. "I was the Pillsbury Dough Boy," Jo says. "For me to get out of the airplane, I needed help."

As they prepared to launch out of Rome, Georgia, the thermometer dipped down to a bone-chilling 27 degrees F. To commemorate the moment Steve etched the temperature into the frost on the windshield and smiled for the camera. From beginning to end the persistent cold nipped at their heels, made their joints stiff, and flowed through the door gaps with teeth-chattering and shiver-inducing ease.

The temperature finally began to rise out of the lower numbers by the time they got to Perry-Foley Airport in north Florida. The weather in general had become somewhat less cooperative, however. Fog and rain became the new adversary. "The weather out

of Perry was the one thing that was daunting," admits Jo. "From Perry to Cross City, there's nothing. It's no-man's land."

With a decidedly damp air mass to navigate through, visibility was less than stellar. After two days in flight and with a landing back home on the third within their grasp, the Alcorns pressed on. The weather was legal for VFR flight, even if the visibility was less than they might have hoped for. So they took advantage of the rising thermometer and opened the window. Steve, sitting in the back seat, slipped

the airplane in cruise flight, allowing the pair to follow U.S. Highway 27. The highway runs south and passes within a half mile of the Cross City Airport, where the couple made their tenth landing of the trip, fueled up, and set off for the last two legs of the journey.

The flight ended the way a romantic comedy might. The sun was low in the sky, a Cub on floats was landing at the seaplane base on the western side of the airport, and both Alcorns were ready to get out of the airplane, get away from the engine noise, and stretch their legs for a good long while. They flew the pattern and touched down on Runway 5 at Gilbert Field to end their expedition on a warm November evening. As they rolled out Steve teased Jo, "Oh, I bounced that landing. Let's go around and come back." Jo made her position crystal clear by calling, "I'll kill you."

They taxied off the active runway and tucked the Cub away for the night.

AOPA



STEVE ALCORN after a particularly cold day in Rome, Georgia, where he etched the day's temperature in frost on the windshield of the Cub—"Help! 27 degrees."

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