



Hello Everyone,

It's just expected that as our old water wagons are getting older, parts will be harder to find. I think sometimes what we lose sight of though, is that we are losing experienced people too. Old magnificent airplanes always seem to command respect, but let's not forget about all the dedicated individuals that have made maintaining such wonderful aircraft a passion in their lives. Just over a month ago we lost Ken Thompson. I've included letters from Ed (ET) Tello and John Cuny this month who offered to share with you what it was like knowing Ken. It is my hope that as we takeoff into this New Year you all will share with the group, stories and references of those that help you maintain the old beast.

I did hear from Scott Henderson at McHugh Aviation (Simuflight) in Fallon NV, they have Greg Murray that will be taking over for Ken. He and Ken have been working side by side for the past 15 years. Greg told me about meeting Ken when he first took his Luscombe to him. Ken's craftsmanship and dedication was such an inspiration to Greg that it started him on a whole new career. I guess that Ken thought enough of Greg that he's turned the business over to him.

I understand from talking to ET, Henry Ruzakowski's shop is full, and I've heard from Richie Brumm's customers that he is swamped and considering selling his shop. In addition, I just got word that my wonderful FBO that has maintained our Bee since its total restoration in '94 will be closing this spring. Great people are hard to find, so please share with the rest of us those that you trust. I'll let the Seabee world know.

#### A winter distraction

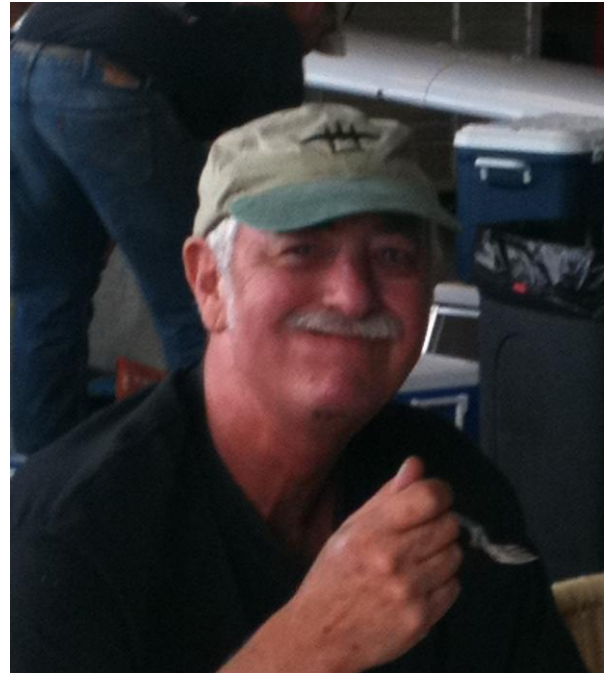
For those of you that are buried in the snow and cold that has overcome most of the U.S. and can't bring yourself to leave the house. I've found two books that will keep you turning pages. Budd Davisson the popular aviation writer has published *Cobalt Blue* and *The Stonewall File*. Both of these intriguing stories revolve around pilots flying great airplanes. I'm not much of a novel reader since I read so many aviation magazines. I can't seem to sit still for too long. Well, for Christmas I purchased the Stonewall File for my son that is big

into events that happen or are linked to WWII and I actually bought myself *Cobalt Blue*. Things were pretty cold and slow here just before Christmas so I opened mine to look inside. I've never read a novel that fast before . . . then I couldn't help myself, I had to look inside his book before I wrapped it up. I've never read two novels in less than a week before. Don't get these books if you plan on getting a good night's rest. I understand that Budd is planning another novel that will continue with the characters from *Cobalt Blue*.

### Ken Thompson

*Knowing Ken, you have to wonder what the conversation was about when this picture was snapped!*

Mr. Seabee, that's who many of us Seabee drivers used to call our dear friend Ken Thompson. He was one of the 4 most knowledgeable Seabee guys in the whole world, the other 3 being Henry Ruzakowski, Richie Brumm, and Don Wallace, in my humble opinion. My Seabee Madness started when I saw the 007 movie *The Man with the Golden Gun*, where Roger Moore flies a Seabee around some breathtaking scenery to find the bad guy, played by Ricardo Montalban. I was 14, and I was hooked. It wasn't until 22 years later that I actually saw a Bee face to face, at that wonderland place called Airventure 1996. It was for sale, and I wanted her bad! But it was sold to someone else that night! Determined to get a Seabee (after all, I was a "rich" airline pilot), I grabbed a Trade-a-Plane right there at Oshkosh, and found one for sale on Long Island, NY.



I knew nothing about Seabees when I bought that first one in September, 1996. So, through some people at my airline, I got to know 3 other UAL Seabee "victims," Ron Lyle, Sam Richardson, and most of all, Don Kyte. They were all in agreement that I had to talk to this eccentric but extremely talented mechanic named Ken Thompson if I ever wanted to get into this Seabee madness. I was forewarned that he was a heavy smoker and drinker, and very gruff and grumpy at times.

So I call this Ken guy, and tell him I just bought this Seabee on the east coast and want to fly it to California. First question he asks is, "Is it a Lycoming Bee, or a Franklin Bee?" I tell him it's a Franklin, and I wasn't even finished when he said rather seriously, "Read my lips, TRUCK IT." Well, I ignored that advice because I really wanted to build time in this airplane so I could have the required hours to get my seaplane rating in it. Less than a week later, my instructor and I crashed that Bee in Santa Fe, NM! (That's another long story, too painful to tell yet.) Ken's words were right in my mind shortly after . . . especially when he found out. Let me tell you, there are no secret bad things happening in the Seabee world without all Bee drivers finding out immediately! He told me, "I told you to TRUCK the F\*#%~ airplane!"

I instantly gained a lot of respect for this Ken Thompson. My obsession with the Beast drove me to find another in Chuckey, TN. This time it was a Lycoming GO-480 powered airplane in need of severe restoration. With Ken's blessing, a wonderful man named Steve Hensley and I put that Seabee together over the summer of 1997 and flew it all the way to California. I flew it to Sonoma Air Park, where Ken did his magic with many other Bees. I showed up with a big bottle of Don Q 151 Puerto Rican Rum, and that sealed our friendship! Ken took a look at my "ugly" Bee, and in his gruff voice said, "take it apart." And so began our 3 year odyssey restoring N713ET!

He let me work on her as much as I could, and tolerated all my mistakes learning the Seabee. He particularly relished in finding the many things that were broken or wrong with her, and telling me, "don't worry, it'll only be about \$1000 bucks!" But thanks to his no-compromise, talented work, I ended up with a superb, safe, flying machine that is admired by everyone who sees her!

I can honestly say that Ken changed my life and the lives of my wife and sons. They grew up surrounded by Seabee parts and spent many days in a beat-up motor home we acquired to stay close to the Bee @ Sonoma Sky Park while she was being restored. The joys and unforgettable adventures (and incidents) we've experienced with our Seabee the last 13 years are all possible because of our dear friend Ken Thompson.

Now both our boys want to be pilots, and I know a lot of it has to do because of all that wonderful flying in the Beast. My wife calls it our Magic Carpet, and indeed she has been! She's taken us to wonderful places that other non-seaplane pilots can only dream of, and allowed us to meet some really wonderful people.

Rest in peace, my dear friend. You certainly brought joy to the few privileged pilots who got to know you.

Edgar E.T. Tello

UAL B-757 Capt, but better yet, Seabee Pilot

My Buddy! You know how the military watches our backs. They are always there for us in the darkest of times, or during your times of triumph. Ken was that type of Guy. He came into the aviation group of Seabees in the 80's. My first encounter with Ken was at Clear Lake. At that time it was the young guys verses the old guys. Ken would sit on the park bench which was in the center of the Hotel lot with Seabees all around. He was always there to learn and help. As more owners became aware of Ken's talents he started to do many Seabee projects.

We moved our Luscombe to Half Moon Bay California about this time to escape the heat of Texas summers. Ken welcomed me like a brother and invited me to come visit and stay with him anytime in we were in the area of Sonoma Sky Park. He was always working on a Seabee. Ken worked for Joe McHugh from Simuflight, and also had many private owner projects getting the old flying boats airworthy. In the early 2000's Joe passed away and Ken was wanting to move out of California. I made the suggestion that Ken partner up with Joe's son Scott Henderson. As most of us know, this was a perfect match. Ken loved working on Seabees. He would get up every day knowing someone out there needed his help. He was the go-to guy. I'm not sure how much money Scott made from Ken's work but I know the Seabee community gain was priceless. As Ken's health started to fail he never wanted anyone to be burdened by his needs. It was always about the shop and what could he do to keep another Seabee flying.

You are gone now buddy, but every time I crank my bird or wipe her down I will remember how much you helped me and the Seabee community. Thanks for watching my back all these years.

Retired American Airlines, Captain John Cuny  
# 433 N6230K.

As I'd mentioned in an earlier newsletter, I did not know Ken well. My first encounter with him was on our first visit to the Clear Lake Splash-In. Since we didn't fly down that year, they needed someone to operate a hand held for the flying events and I got handed the radio. This guy next to me on the park bench seemed to know all the Bees, owners and most everyone else at the event. More surprisingly, he seemed to know who I was. We'd only owned the Bee for 5 years, doing a very simple newsletter for just over 3 years and this guy Ken was treating me like we were long lost buddies. It wasn't until much later I learned who Ken Thompson was. Hearing these stories about Ken I only wish I'd known him better. Thanks ET and John.

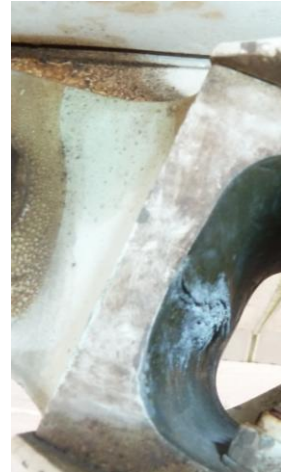
Greg Murray from Simuflight called and mentioned that they are planning some kind of a memorial later in the year. There is no date set as yet, stay tuned and I'll let you know when I find out.

Speaking of Memorials - are any of you in the NE planning to help out in the memorial fly-by for Doug Pierce this coming June? (Dec. Newsletter)

### Safety



Are you doing your strut inspections? I tend to forget it's not only every 6 months, but also every 25 hours. We've got an old Bee in sad shape on our field, I took these pictures just to scare you. Keep them well coated to keep moisture out!



### Stuff

Thanks for taking the time to read through all this. Feel free to call or write, offer comments, criticism and/or suggestions. Help us keep the Seabee alive. Seabee is always spoken here. Let us know what you are looking for or would like to get rid of. I'll post it here.

Bee Sea n'ya and have a Happy(and safe)New Year,

Bruce Hinds

[BruceHinds@EarthLink.net](mailto:BruceHinds@EarthLink.net)

360-710-5793 cell