



I'm really missing summer about now! How about you?

Hey Everyone,

From what I hear it has been unseasonably warm around the country and now many areas are paying for it, so I hope you are able to get out and enjoying some flying during the good days you do have. I know we've been missing nice flying weather since we've been stuck in AZ for a few months. Hold on..... I can hear you all now, "oh, too bad." Actually many of our nights have been colder than at home. "Poor Bruce"... well yes the days are nice, but we don't have the Bee here, so we are really missing it. Had we known we'd be here this long, we sure would have considered bringing the Bee, but we're now dealing with my mom's estate. That's part of the reason for a combined Jan/Feb newsletter, the other, well, a lack of content. Until last night that is.

So, for those of you that can't fly right now how about an adventure story?? I feel blessed to have met some of the Seabee Gurus over the past 12 short years of my involvement with the old Beast, one of them is Don Kyte. Original founder of the Northwest Seabee Club, the Can-American Seabee Club and one of the previous authors of the Seabee Newsletter, Don just sent me the following note.

"Hi Bruce, As time marches on I realize that some of the stories I have written over the years might never get out of my computer. When my time comes to "Fly West", my lap-top may not survive either. My family might not even know what to do with them. While I am in pretty good health, at 83 and a failing memory, I thought I should send them on to you for whatever use you might want to make of them. Don"

How fortunate am I? I called him first thing today to let him know I'll be backing up everything he sends and to ask him if we could preserve his stuff for all to read on the IRSOC website. He was delighted with the idea, so the next call was to Steve Mestler to see if we could do just that.

"Absolutely," Steve's as excited as I am about that and informed me he'd actually never read Don's book, "Flightseeing in AK"(I think that's the name). So, with that in mind and my recent ramblings these past months about how I love flying in the company of other Seabees, I'm going to dispense with the usual format of "boiler plate newlsetter" and for the sake of room and file size this newsletter will be missing all the classifieds, experts and such so you can enjoy Don's story. Here ya go.....

This story took place in the late 60's. All of the Seabees had stock Franklin 215hp engines. What a difference over half a century has made in Seabees, radios, cell phones and FARs. Don Kyte, Jan. 30, 2012

SPLASH IN AT LAKE TAHOE

By Don Kyte

All year, Mike Brown, owner and operator of the Homewood Seaplane Base at Lake Tahoe, had been urging our Seabee Club to join them for a big seaplane "Splash In" they were sponsoring that fall during the Reno Air Races. He had made arrangements to have tickets and transportation available to the race as well as all the normal recreational activities available at this beautiful lake. Mike owned a Seabee so we had a fraternal obligation to attend, but I think the main reason our club accepted Mike's invitation and were willing to herd our lumbering gas-burning amphibians all that distance was to see for ourselves if a Seabee could really fly off of that 6,400 foot high lake.

According to the owners manual, the original stock Seabee, as it rolled off the production line in 1947 would require a take-off run of 18,500 feet at 6000' altitude on a 60 degree day at gross weight. Assuming you did make it off you could then expect to climb at the phenomenal rate of 87 feet per minute. After thrashing three miles down a lake trying to get off, I'm not sure I would have been in much of a mood to fly anywhere, especially at 87 feet per minute. Fortunately, a number of modifications, such as metal prop blades, big splash-rails, root-plates, etc, have turned the Seabee into a somewhat better airplane than it was in 1947. Mike Brown and Wes Stetson have been hauling full loads of passengers out of Lake Tahoe for over a decade. Some of their stories are so wild, even I am reluctant to repeat them. At any rate, Mike's "Splash-In" was a good opportunity to see for ourselves, and possibly learn some of their tricks.

By departure time we had lined up four Seabees from Seattle. Tom and Kathy Palmer, Tony and Maybeth Grout, each flying Seabees with landing gear removed so that they were actually flying-boats. Carl Bergman and Jack Daubenspeck in Carl's Seabee with extended wings, and then my wife, Maxine, and me in our stock Seabee, but sporting a new set of droop wing-tips recently designed by Jack Daubenspeck. These tips had been rushed to completion and given a speedy Field Approval by the FAA so they could be ready for this trip. We were anxious to find out if they did as much to improve the Seabee's performance at altitude as they did at sea level. After numerous phone calls it was agreed that Carl would rendezvous with Maxine and me at Tacoma Industrial Airport, since it was just across the channel from Steilacoom Marina, which Tom and his father own, and keep their Seabee.

Our flight to Tacoma Industrial was routine and in due time Carl's Seabee droned into sight. We watched as Carl landed and came to a halt on the runway in an unusually nose-high attitude. Trouble already!! Carl's tail-wheel had collapsed! The Seabee is rugged, however, and other than grinding off some metal from the tail-wheel fork, there was no damage. The tail-wheel could not be retracted or extended in the normal manner, however. Fortunately, Carl's passenger would be ace-mechanic and aircraft designer, Jack Daubenspeck, who worked out a way of extending and retracting it manually back at the tail-wheel. This meant Jack would have to do a considerable amount of wading whenever Carl wanted to taxi up out of the water. All landings would also be on water, because they did not want to trust the weakened fork. Since two of the Seabees were flying boats, we hadn't planned to do any airport landings anyway, and Carl could still pullout of the water for overnight stops.

As soon as Carl had refueled, our two Sea bees took-off. Tom and Kathy were ready to go and as soon as they saw us leave the ground they took-off from the water in front of the Marina. Joining up in the air we flew the short distance to American Lake Seaplane Base where Tony and Maybeth were waiting for us, and we were on our way. The weather was overcast at two or three thousand feet with widely scattered rain showers. No problem for our flight, but the ten to fifteen knots of wind caused the air to be somewhat rough at our altitude. We all guarded 122.9, the plane-to-plane radio frequency, and just north of Longview, Tom radioed that Kathy was very sick, and he would have to land. Rather than split up the flight, I suggested we all land. We had been following a river all the way, so Tom picked out the longest clear stretch of water he could find, and landed, with the rest of us right behind. Since space along the bank for beaching was limited, I stayed in the middle of the river. The current was rather swift but did not match my idle taxi speed. I found I could remain in one spot by moving my reverse-control lever out of its forward and locked detent a bit to flatten my prop pitch. This did the trick nicely, but apparently several fishermen nearby did not appreciate their new noisy neighbor, and soon packed their gear and headed for more tranquil scenes. After about 15 minutes, Tom

reported that Kathy felt well enough to go on, so we roared off the river, and rejoined formation to finish our flight to our next refueling point, the Seaplane Base at Florence, Oregon. This was owned by Floyd Doland and his wife. They own two Seabees themselves, and had stocked up on fuel for our arrival, knowing from experience about the Seabee's appetite for fuel.

To save congestion at Floyd's dock, I landed at the Florence Airport and while the operator was gassing my 'Bee, I borrowed his courtesy car to run down to the Seaplane Base to pow-wow with the rest of the gang. Refueling was well along, but since daylight might be a problem on the next leg to the Skylark Hotel Seaplane Base at Clear Lake, California, we decided not to eat, as originally planned, but grab some candy and cookies and push on. I knew that one or two of the 'Bees would have to taxi around in the lake till I joined them, so wasted no time getting airborne. I had already checked my oil, so all I did was pay my bill, fire up, and take-off. The one thing I did not do, but should have done, was check my gas cap. All went well until our flight reached our cruising altitude of 3,500 feet, but as soon as I had leveled out and picked up speed, we heard a loud banging on the side of the plane somewhere behind us. Since I had never experienced this before, I had no idea what the trouble was. I asked (ordered) my terrified wife to climb into the back seat and open the baggage compartment access lid to see if she could see anything. At the same time I radioed the rest of the flight and told them about my problem. Maxine gingerly peeked into the baggage compartment and hurriedly shut it again (not wanting whatever it might be to get into the cabin with us, she said). By this time Tom had pulled alongside to report that my gas-cap was off and flying around on its safety chain!

Other than some chipped paint where the cap had beat into the side of the plane, there was no damage, but the big worry was the possibility of the chain breaking and the cap flying back through the propeller. All owners of pusher-type airplanes know that nothing flies back through the prop arc without hitting a blade --- something to do with Murphy's Law, I think. In this case, something as big as a gas-cap could ruin a prop-blade and seriously unbalance it. The resultant vibrations have been known to be so severe that they have torn engines from their mounts. All of this can happen so quickly you might not have time to close the throttle before it is too late. We were right over the bay at Reedsport, Oregon so I closed the throttle completely, lowered the flaps and descended for a landing. One advantage of flying a Seabee is that you're never far from a suitable landing place. (Some skeptics say, "If you fly a Seabee, you BETTER not be far from a suitable landing place!")

With the airspeed reduced to a minimum, there was only an occasional thump on the cabin from the gas-cap, and the landing was completely normal. All this time I had been too busy handling the problem to inform my wife what had happened. Not wanting to interfere, she had remained silent, and hung on for dear life as we completed a forced landing in the middle of a strange bay, knowing only that something that required a forced landing must be very serious indeed. It had never occurred to me that she did not know what the problem was. All this was brought out in great detail later in the year at the dinner-meeting of our Seabee Club when the annual "Carncross Cup" was awarded for the biggest "goof" of the year. By the time my wife had completed her heartbreaking story of this minor incident, there wasn't a dry eye in the place and I had won the "Carncross Cup" hands down.

At this point I should explain what the "Carncross Cup" was all about. Charley Carncross was a prominent member of the Vancouver (Canada) Seabee Club. Charley had done something, or forgotten to do something involving his Seabee, that had caused him some embarrassment. At the next dinner-meeting someone got up and said that the Club had decided to make an award for the biggest goof of the year and it would henceforth be called, the "Carncross Cup". They then brought out a crudely welded "cup" made of a piece of pipe with a washer welded to it for a handle. They had stamped, "Carncross Cup" on its side and awarded it to Charley. Everyone had so much fun with that, that Charley thought it ought to be an annual award. The Seattle Seabee Club and the Vancouver Club had joined forces some years before. I think I was the third or fourth recipient of the cup.

It took but a moment to shutdown the engine, open the door, replace the cap, and take-off again to rejoin our circling Seabee flight overhead. In fairness to the operator at the Florence airport, it was not his fault. He

had properly secured the gas-cap, but it turned out the cap had become worn and needed replacement. As soon as we had settled down in cruise once again, to enjoy the beautiful Oregon coast scenery under blue skies, I had time to do a little flight planning to establish our ETA at Clear Lake. A call to the North Bend Flight Service Station confirmed my fears. At our present ground speed, it would be a battle to arrive at Clear Lake before dark. Since that was the only Seaplane Base between Florence and San Francisco, we had a problem. Our late departure; river landing; and my own forced landing had eaten up the comfortable margin we once had.

When we reached Eureka, California we had to turn inland and climb to follow the pass through the mountains to Clear Lake. This was also where we picked up a thick lower layer of clouds requiring us to fly "on top" The Arcata FSS told us this would turn to clear skies again just before reaching Ukiah so we had no fear of being trapped on top. We were losing ground reference for navigation, however, so I suggested that Tony pull ahead and navigate for us, since he had the only dual radio setup that could tune in an omni navigation station and still monitor 122.9 to talk to us. Both Tom and Tony had brand new radios that they had installed just for this trip. (Seabee owners take long cross-country trips very seriously) Without landing gear, the two Seabee flying-boats were about 10 mph faster than Carl or I. I also urged Tony and Tom to open up and go at full speed without waiting for us because it was more critical for them to make the lake before dark than Carl or I. Even though Carl's tail-wheel could not be extended, a wheel landing without it was not a major problem so if need be, we could continue on to an airport.

Right after Tony pulled ahead, and before we had completely lost ground contact, I noticed that he seemed to be heading about 50 degrees left of the correct course. I called to him on the radio, but he didn't answer. Later it was discovered that due to the location of his antenna, he could receive and transmit ahead but transmissions were blocked out behind. Tom tried to chase after him, but couldn't catch him, and soon all of us had lost sight of him. We could only hope he would be at Clear Lake waiting for us. We held a compass course till we had passed over the cloud-deck, and before long we could make out Clear Lake in the gathering gloom. I had never flown into Skylark before, but knew it was on the northwest shore.

Tom and I tore down the shoreline at full speed, and low enough to recognize the motel when we flew over it. Three quarters of the way down the shore, and just as the light was about to give out, I spotted a wind-sock. It had to be the motel. We turned out away from shore, made a "180" (reversed course) and landed. By the time we had taxied the few hundred remaining yards to shore it was fully dark. With the aid of the floodlights at the motel, we tied up Tom's flying boat at the dock while I taxied ashore and parked on the grass. Jack had to do his familiar wading act with Carl's tail-wheel so that he could join me on the grass parking area. We were grateful to have reached our objective in time but our joy was overshadowed with worry because Tony and Maybeth were not there! Had they overshot? We checked the map for possible bodies of water they could land on in the direction they had taken. There were none! On the other hand, Clear Lake was a big lake, perhaps they had landed further down the shoreline and would call soon to let us know where they were.

The motel owner couldn't have been nicer. After getting settled he loaned us his Cadillac to drive down to a plush restaurant for dinner. We ordered, but it had now been several hours since darkness had fallen. We were pretty sure they were alright. Both Tony and Maybeth were experienced pilots with lots of flight time. They had plenty of gas, and a good sound Seabee. Maybe they were down on some deserted reservoir, forced to spend the night floating in a cold airplane with no food! I didn't think we were going to enjoy our steaks that night. Then the phone rang! It was a call for Tom from Tony. He said they had landed in the river near Red Bluff, California. It was nearly dark before they realized that their newly installed radio was not working right. To complicate matters, their compass was not reading correctly due to sticking bearings. Over the years all the fluid had leaked out without their knowledge. The faulty compass complicated the problems the faulty radio had caused. When Clear Lake did not appear where it was supposed to be, they saw some lights of a fairly large town, and headed for them. They could see a river running through town, picked out the best spot and landed. They had tied the Seabee up to shore, and were spending the night in a motel. That steak tasted just great.

Next morning was bright and clear and after refueling and breakfast, we prepared to leave. We tried to

call Tony to coordinate, but he had checked out. Tom had told Tony when we hoped to be airborne, and Tony thought he could make it by then too. He would stand by on 122.9 so when we took-off we were sure we could make contact en route. We called repeatedly but couldn't reach Tony. The weather was clear, but the forecast warned of high winds over the Sierras. As we neared the mountains we climbed higher and higher for insurance against downdrafts. None of us had ever flown our Seabees so high. Before long we were over 10,000 feet and at the summit we were at 11,500 feet! Pretty good for a so-called sea-level airplane! The air didn't get rough till we had passed over the summit, and then we were glad we had that extra altitude, because soon we were caught in downdrafts that registered over 1,500 fpm. These didn't last long, and we never lost over 7 or 8 hundred feet before gaining it right back again with an equally strong updraft. The turbulence was quite strong and we were glad to be over the lake after just a few miles of this.

We flew down the middle of the lake and dropped low to escape as much of the turbulence as possible. At the same time we tuned to 122.8 and gave Homewood Unicom a call. Mike came right back in his loud, resonant voice, and said he had us in sight. Mike soon had us headed directly for Homewood on the west shore, and into the teeth of the howling west wind. The water was very rough out where we were, but I knew it would smooth out the closer we got to shore, because the wind would have less chance to whip up the big waves. I don't like to land directly toward shore, because it allows you less room for a go-around if you misjudge, and land too close to shore to stop before hitting the beach. We had no choice this time. The wind was much too strong. As we dropped close to the water and lowered our flaps to be ready for the landing, I noticed the wind seemed to be changing direction. I had never seen wind shift so rapidly. It changed direction three times during my landing approach. Both Carl and I managed to touch down squarely into the wind, but shifted on Tom at the last minute. Thanks to the Seabee's rugged construction, he made it alright, but with a healthy respect for Lake Tahoe's wind conditions.

After we were safely ashore, we learned that the wind only blew that bad three or four times a year and it was so bad they had cancelled some of the races at Reno after they had lost several light planes. We were amazed to watch the boats riding at anchor. They would all be pointed south into a strong wind, only to swing around 180 degrees, all at once, and point north, into an equally strong wind. Like some aquatic ballet. Wow! I sure was glad to be on the ground, but where was Tony? Several hours later we still hadn't heard from him, so we called the Sheriff in Red Bluff, because Tony had mentioned the Sheriff had been very helpful to them the night before helping to securing their plane, etc. The Sheriff reported that they had some difficulty refueling since it had to be carried to the plane in buckets and they didn't get airborne till about noon, several hours later than planned. When they didn't show up that afternoon, we assumed they had heard the wind reports and perhaps had cancelled plans to fly up and had gone to San Francisco instead, since they had mentioned they would like to "Do" San Francisco if they had a chance on this trip.

Our stay at Homewood was delightful and Mike proved to be an excellent host. We met some good friends from Chicago that had flown in via airlines and twin-fanned land birds. Other friends had driven up from San Francisco and Los Angeles, but we were the only airplanes to land at the lake. The gang from Los Angeles had heard the wind reports and had detoured to Lake Berryessa. There was some doubt that the Reno Races would run as planned Sunday, because the strong winds were predicted for the afternoon, as well. Since we wanted to see Percy Spencer's new four place homebuilt amphibian the, "Air Car", which was at Lake Berryessa and maybe Channing Clarks' Fleetwing Seabird, we elected to fly down to Berryessa as they did not plan to come to Tahoe now. Mike took a load of delegates from Chicago in his Seabee, while the rest headed for Berryessa by landplane or car and we proceeded to move the whole "Splash In" from Tahoe to Berryessa.

Here, at last, was what we had traveled so far to experience. Our moment of truth! Our take-off from 6,400 foot high Lake Tahoe. We had quizzed Mike closely about take-off technique. Full throttle; lean the engine for best RPM; then make a normal take-off. I was amazed to find that my take-off with a half tank of fuel and two onboard was about what I would expect with four onboard and three-fourth's tank of fuel at sea-level. I would guess our run was about 3000 feet.

Wow! The Seabee really is a high altitude airplane!

After take-off I made a turn to check on the others. Everyone made it fine except Carl, who couldn't seem to get his Seabee to plane on "the step". After several attempts he finally made it. Later we learned Carl and Jack had somehow missed Mike's briefing and were trying to make their take-off with the mixture in full rich, instead of leaning it out as Mike had advised. All they could get was about 2000 RPM's, not enough power to get on "the step". On the last attempt, reason prevailed over habit, and they worked out their own leaning technique. I was especially happy over my take-off (as was Jack) because the Daubenspeck Droop Tips seemed to work even better at altitude than it did at sea-level. My standard wing Seabee took-off as easily as any of the others, in spite of each of the others having long wings or no landing gear or both. I also seemed to have an advantage in climb rate and speed.

Berryessa was very enjoyable, and was especially thrilling for me, because I had a chance to give Percy Spencer, the designer of the Seabee, his first Seabee ride in 8 years. At 72, Spence is still a marvelous pilot and sharp as a tack. We flew directly to nearby Clear Lake for the night, and called Homewood to see if Tony and Maybeth had phoned in yet. They hadn't! The Skylark Motel hadn't heard anything either, and it suddenly dawned on us that no one had seen or heard from them since their take-off some 30 hours earlier! What if they hadn't heard the wind reports, and continued on, instead of going to San Francisco? They would have arrived at the height of the wind storm, and if they had traveled a direct route, would have been exposed to severe up and down drafts most of the way! I have heard of many light planes (and some big ones) pulled clear to the ground under similar circumstances.

We made calls to all known Seaplane Bases in San Francisco. When no one reported any sign of them, we really got worried. After some debate, we all agreed it was time to report them missing. The night was punctuated with phone calls from various officials, as they each requested as many facts as we could give them. By morning the FAA's search machinery had proceeded through the various phases till they were on the verge of a full scale aerial search. One thing we had not done till now was call Tony and Maybeth's home, because we did not want to alarm their parents needlessly, who were babysitting the children. Now the news would soon be on the radio, and we wanted them to hear it from us. Tom made the call.

When he returned he was grinning from ear to ear. Tony's folks had received a telegram from Maybeth saying they were in San Francisco having a wonderful time! We quickly called the FAA just in time to call off the search. Later we learned that Tony did hear the wind reports and never attempted the Tahoe trip, but headed directly for San Francisco. We never found out why the Seaplane Base didn't report their Seabee as being there, for Tony said it was tied up in plain sight. They had tried to phone Homewood but didn't know the name of the Seaplane Base there, or remember Mike Brown's name. We had become separated before I had a chance to brief everyone.

The trip home up the California and Oregon coast was the kind you long remember. Sun, blue sky and seashore, and the special joy of sharing these things with good friends as you realize how you are the envy of most of the people waving to you from the beach as you pass by in formation. The only thing that could have made it better was the time of year. Bikini season had been over for several months!

Good weather on the Oregon coast means brisk northwest winds. With a headwind factor of 15 to 20 mph we had some doubt about making Florence, so we elected to land in the bay off North Bend Airport and refuel. I had remembered this could be done from my early flying days when I instructed at the North Bend Airport. The gas truck's hose was just barely long enough and even so, Jack and Tom both had to do some wading. I elected to obtain my fuel more conventionally from the pumps at the airport ramp. Tom and Carl were off and away before I was ready to leave, so I made the short flight up the beach to Florence by myself. I missed the excitement when Carl landed.

After touchdown, Carl was attempting a step turn when a sudden gust of wind smashed his outside wing float into the water breaking it off. Carl and Jack acted correctly, and after shutting down the engine, quickly climbed out on the wing strut on the opposite side of the plane to right the Seabee again. With Jack perched on the strut, Carl fired up and taxied to the dock at the Seaplane Base. Wish I had a picture of that! Carl decided to stay with his Seabee and relax while Jack joined Maxine and me for the flight home. The hardest part of the

trip was still ahead for Jack. He had to pull a wing float from his own Seabee, and drive all that way back to Florence so Carl could complete the trip.

We may not travel as far, or as fast, as our land plane counterparts, but when it comes to good comradeship, and high adventure, you can't beat a Seabee Club Cross-Country flight.

Don Kyte

Okay, there ya have it gang. Thanks so much Don. Makes ya want to plan a trip together right? In fact, Don is trying to plan a trip in the next few years to AK. Tom Hillier and his son David have restored Jim Sorensen's Bee and C-206 and hope to make the trip. I think they should meet several of us in WA and we can head north together. I know Don's planning on driving his new motorhome north this summer, perhaps when he comes through Seattle we can have a party for him. Let me know who's in.....

I'll go back to the regular format next month. If you need any of that information, you can always find my old newsletters on the International Republic Seabee Owners Club (IRSOC) website, www.republicSeabee.com.

Remember Procrastination is the key to flexibility!

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