

Welcome to Seabee Hospital!

Ode to Melody and Benjie Coleman

The “Seabee Hospital” is also home of “Seabee Theater”, owned and operated by entrepreneurs Ben and Melody Coleman from a swamp in Florida. Yes, it is a hospital because these Seabees were all rescued and will someday fly again...or at least parts and pieces of them. I have known Ben and Mel a long time and they have always done what they said they would do.....if they say this is a hospital and not a graveyard, I’m saying it’s a hospital!

Ben has always been an admirer of the venerable Seabee from his childhood riding around with his dad in the family J-3 Cub. “The little booger would see the ‘funny’ looking aircraft at airports and always wanted to go crawl around on them!” says his dad, Buddy Coleman.

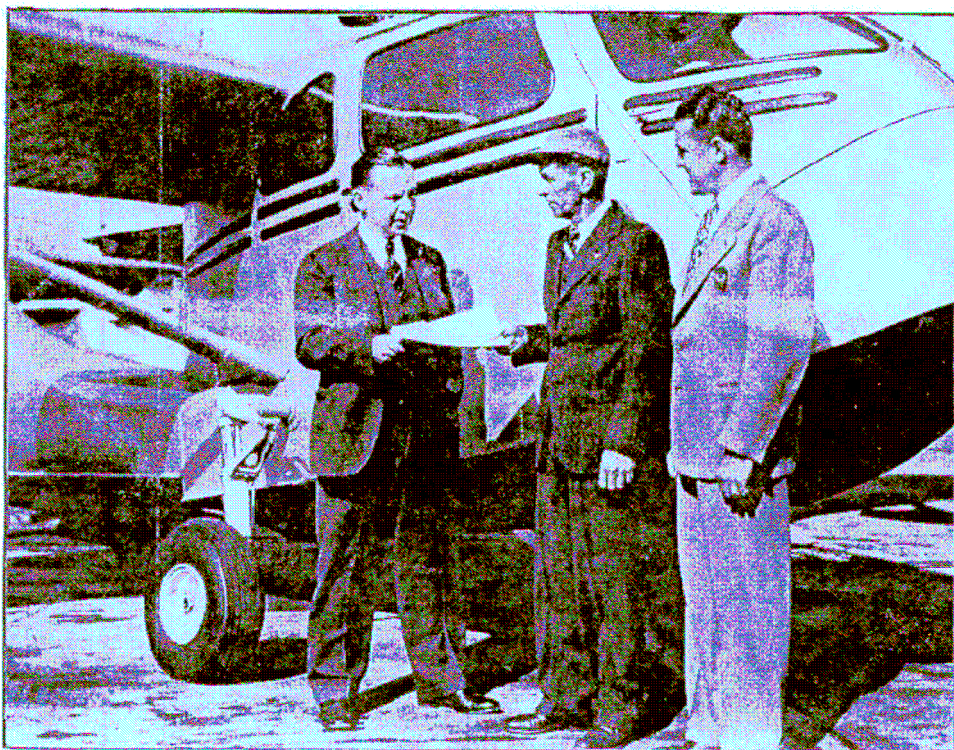


The last article on the Coleman’s and the Seabee’s included a rescue from a storage unit and the jungles of Tampa, Florida. They have made some progress, but had to pause in the restorations to build and house and hangar in which to store and save these Seabees.

Ben recently returned from a mission that took him to the Middle East. Contrary to popular belief that he was there on a contract with the US Department of State, he admitted he was actually there looking for Seabee parts! “I searched all over the place, but there was not a Republic Seabee part anywhere...plenty of Iraqi Republic Guard parts though....”.



The Coleman's have many friends that are part of their projects. One in particular is aviation entrepreneur Wayne Garner. Wayne actually knew the late Capt. Richard "Dick" Sanders and is the provider of the Seabee below, serial number 68 that is the first corporate Seabee operated by the Electrol Corporation, in Farmingdale, NY, at that time. The delivery photo is classic.



This aircraft now resides in Lakeland, Florida, at the Coleman's Seabee Hospital! She is aged and has some substantial boo boo's, but if man made it, man can fix it! Venerable warbird restorer Tom Reilly is familiar with this project and affectingly informed Ben he would have over \$ 200,000.00, invested in the refurbishment of serial number 68. Of course, Ben responded to him, but I will get \$ 300,000.00, in pleasure out of the project so I'm 100 grand to the good!



Melody's favorite is the brown Seabee that was lovingly saved from Maryland with Capt. Jim Poel as the loadmaster of the journey back in 2004. That is another article all its own and will be coming out soon; "Jim and Ben's great adventure!"

This Seabee was first visited by the Coleman's on one of Ben's special romantic vacations. Ben offered to take Mel to Washington, DC, for a charming white Christmas back in 2003. On the way back, Ben asked her if she minded stopping off on the way back to look at an abandoned Seabee....being the supportive and romantically charged wife she easily agreed. What he didn't tell her is that the "stop on the way back" was 150 mile further north and oh, by the way, we need to buy an enclosed trailer to load some parts....like engines, floats, propellers, flight control surfaces, etc.

She was a real trooper up until he had her crawling through the rafters of a rat infested shed to retrieve Seabee bits and pieces because he was "too heavy and might fall....". I'm not sure if they have been on a romantic vacation since.

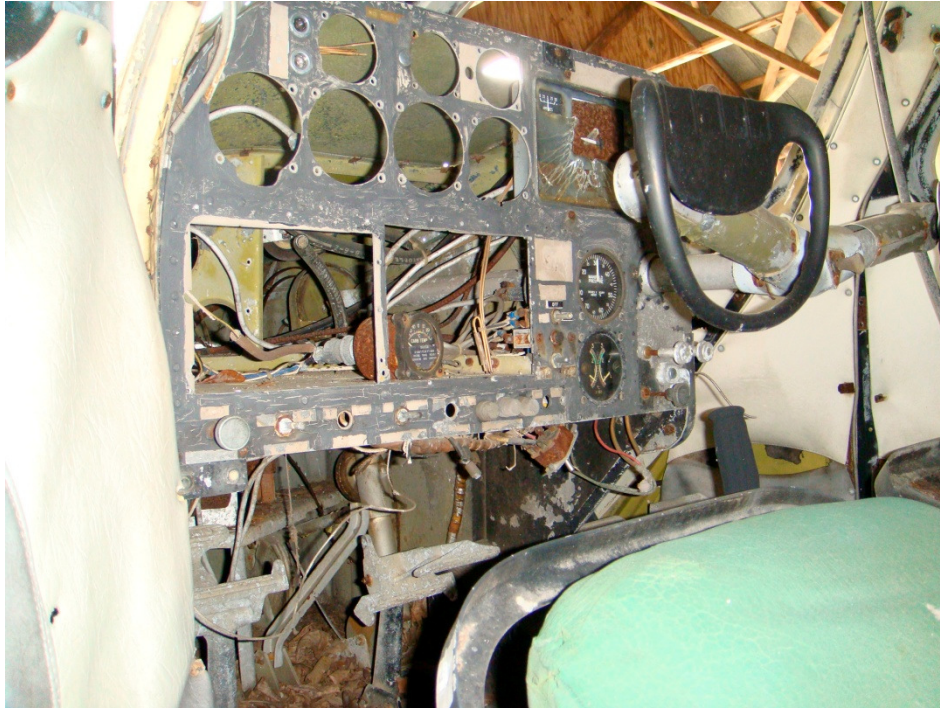


This Seabee was involved in a collision with trainer aircraft as it was sitting, tied down and minding its own business. The details of the bullet holes and such will be presented in "Jim and Ben's Big Adventure", coming soon to an internet near you!



Ben is also a philanthropist! He donated the last major component missing from the Seabee that is perched under the massive wing of the Spruce Goose in the Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum in McMinnville, Oregon. Yes, he saw fit to strip the original Republic Aircraft “parking knob” from one of his little patients to complete the Evergreen project! What a guy!

Insert picture of Evergreen Seabee here.....



The rest have come from here and there; wings, engines, cylinders, crankcases, etc. To most they see junk. To the Coleman's, these aircraft are beautiful swan-like creatures that have lost their feathers and need some TLC to make healthy again. Ben and Melody are hopeless romantics when it comes to old aircraft, particularly Seabees. If they are not careful the older they get, one could consider them to be eccentric.

All I know is they are a lot of fun! Ben has a great background in aviation and has some very ambitious plans for the future. Melody is a sweetheart that deserves better, but seems to be OK with Ben's idiosyncrasies. They make a great couple and have built a great place in the swamp. If you are ever in the area, you should stop by.....make sure you call first, Ben has a tendency to walk around naked unless they have company coming.....