

Steve's and ?'s Most Excellent Adventure (by Steve Mestler)

I got a call from a well experienced member saying he had landed in a river south of Walterboro, SC just 10 minutes from his landing there for fuel. He said his left forward exhaust stack had come loose and cranked in three places. There was also smoke coming into the cabin. The time, about 9:30 at night. Getting to him that night was impossible.

He, and the mechanic riding with him (we'll call him mechanic "A") would have to brave the elements until the following morning fighting off whatever wildlife decided to try to make a meal of them that night. Little did my partner and I know that the caretaker of their location offered them first class accommodations (relatively speaking) for the night in sheltered comfort and even let them use his jeep to get food and beer! What luck.

As the two stranded Seabee-ers waited for us to deliver parts and tools, boats happened to pass by and offered them food and drinks. Man, I don't get that kind of service when I am at home! They began to disassemble the exhaust stacks and all the associated partage that goes along with such and undertaking that day. Limited tools and daylight prevented some disassembly but by the time mechanic "B" (noted below) and I got to them they had it all apart and ready for the installation of the new exhaust pipe.

Let me backup a bit; after the call I got on the phone to our local Seabee expert (let's call him mechanic "B") and parts supplier and made plans to fly down to the stranded flyers. There was plentiful good news; the parts were available, the weather was going to cooperate and we were both not working that day. It was, after all was said and done, a miracle.

I woke up the following morning at 5:00 am and left to get the Ol' Marty B ready to go. It would be a long day. Fly an hour and twenty minutes north, two and a half hours south then turn around and fly two and a half hours north again to drop off mechanic "B". I then had to fly home one and a half hours south back to my home base in South Carolina. I would be passing by my house on the lake four times! It was well worth the trouble as I'm sure that anyone with a Seabee can appreciate, including myself, the help they have gotten over the years from fellow Seabee pilots. We are a very small family indeed and very loyal!

The initial trip north to mechanic "B"'s home was uneventful and an inventory of tools, parts and support equipment was taken. Some stuff was left behind for weight considerations but most of it went. We even had a gas torch in case the exhaust didn't fit just right. Plenty of rope was boarded and tools, tools, tools! Can you say heavy?

A fuel stop was made on the way south to the stranded Seabee-ers and then “balls to the walls” to get there by 1:30 PM. We actually got there about 2:30. The weather was spectacular. Just high stratus clouds and, believe it or not, we had a tailwind! That never happens to me when I have to get somewhere fast. Meanwhile the stranded twosome was sitting at the dock on the river south of Walterboro. It happens that the dock was the only dock on the river for miles. The property was spectacular. It happened to be the exact location that the film “Forest Gump” was filmed in its entirety. A beautiful place to be stranded.



L to R: Marty B, Mechanic “A”, Strande “A”, Mechanic “B”, Stranded Seabee
(I took the photo)

As we approached the river the decision was made to start the “grid” search from the west end of the river and fly over at 1500 feet so a better view could be had from our vantage point. The strande’s had a radio in the Seabee so we could talk to them on 123.45. As we progressed down the river strande “A” said that mechanic “A” could hear us coming. We almost missed them! They were hidden by trees and the dock was only partially visible from the air. The river, by the way, wasn’t a straight river. Oh no. There wasn’t a straight piece in the whole thing. “S” turns were a mandatory maneuver during the landing and takeoff phase. Fortunately there was virtually no wind so a landing could be made with little trouble. After touchdown a turn to the left was in order to miss the shoreline coming our way.

Once we taxied to the dock, the “strande’s” helped us tie up to the dock and place bumpers around the critical areas of the Ol’ Marty B. Thinking they were fighting off all kinds of wildlife and starved for food and water, we handed them a couple of sandwiches and a few bottles of water. That’s when they told us about the caretaker and his generosity; jeep, guest house, etc.

Okay, time to go to work. Mechanic "A" had the engine all ready for the new exhaust stack and it was just a matter of fitting the replacement into the engine compartment. It turns out that not all Seabee cowlings are the same. Go figure! A slight amount of trimming was necessary around the cowling hole to get the exhaust pipe clearance through it. Once that was done the two mechanics started putting the engine panels back on and the EGT/CHT probes installed. All in all it took about two hours to get it all done. Not too bad considering.



The only dock on the river! What luck. (Facing south)

Once it was all together a test run was necessary. Being a new airplane to the new owner, the starting procedure wasn't quite refined yet. Plus we didn't know if anything was burned during the descent and landing with hot air blowing straight into the engine compartment. After a few tries it started! Great.

Shutting down the engine it was time to clean up our mess and position the Seabees for departure. I started up the Marty B put her in reverse and moseyed on out to the river. There I was ...alone...drifting around the river until they got the "new" Seabee running. I left mechanic "B" that had come with me on the dock to help the "strandee's" push out. After they got it started I would approach the dock and pick him up through the bow door. Sounds simple enough. The only trouble was the wind had shifted and increased in velocity. It was blowing directly toward the dock so any approach to the dock would be too fast and, once docked, the Marty B would want to turn into the wind; not good for Seabee extremities. Plan "B" was for mechanic "B" to jump in the water and climb aboard (see below).

I was in a holding pattern on the river waiting, and waiting, and waiting for the engine to start. Keep in mind that there was no battery charger on the dock and

they had used up a lot of the juice with radio calls and previous start attempts. Fortunately there were two batteries installed and they needed every last milliamp out of them. Finally after about twenty minutes in the river holding pattern they got it started! Yay! They taxied out to where I was and I switched positions with them so I could pick up mechanic "B" on the dock.

One thing I learned from mechanic "B" was; if you are picking up someone in the water, put the landing gear down and hold the brakes so the passenger can step on the wheel without the wheel spinning. Great idea. As luck would have it (and we needed plenty of that) the wind died down just as I was approaching the dock and mechanic "B" didn't even have to get wet and didn't have to use the above procedure.

WARNING: *Please do not try picking anyone up out of the water unless they have an intimate knowledge of how to get into a Seabee in the first place! Don't be picking up stranded jet-skiers or swimmers this way!*

Taxiing out for takeoff we lined up next to the newly fixed Seabee. Communication was established and we were ready to go. He had a lot more power than I had and was off the water in about ten seconds. I, on the other hand, had to start the takeoff roll kind of straight but toward the end of the run had to make a turn down one of the "S turns" in the river. Thankfully there were no boats or jet skis coming the other way. We would have surely ruined their day if there were. Once airborne we headed directly toward Low Country Airport behind the Seabee we had rescued a mere ten miles away. The new Seabee made an uneventful landing and we landed right behind him and taxied to the gas pumps. As we got out on dry land, a look of frustration was on the faces of both the occupants and rightfully so as explained below.

During the emergency landing, hot exhaust was pouring into the engine compartment and even entered the cockpit. Smoke everywhere evidently. What wasn't known was that the hot air had fried a wire bundle running along side of the lower engine rails. This provided no power to the fuel pressure gauge, airspeed indicator and most importantly the charging system. The batteries were not charging. There was probably other items not working that we didn't have time to trouble shoot. A trip to northern North Carolina had to be put on hold until the next day.

Mechanic "A" from the emergency Seabee managed to sweet talk one of the owners of a hangar close by to borrow a battery charger and extension cord to charge the batteries. Lady luck strikes again.

The time was now about 5:30 pm. I had just enough time to fly mechanic "B" back to North Carolina and maybe make it home about an hour south of there... maybe. The strandeers, on the other hand, would have to spend the night in Low

Country and wait for the batteries to charge and see what awaited them in the morning.

The flight back to mechanic "B"'s house in the Ol' Marty B was uneventful but memorable. Very smooth with high clouds and a tailwind again! It was, after all was said and done, the most beautiful day I had seen in a long time. We had a beautiful sunset to boot.

It was indeed a very long day though. By the time we got to North Carolina it was almost dark and I had to spend the night with mechanic "B". That's not the worst thing that could happen as we had a chance to debrief about the days events and what needed to be done to help out the former strandeers at a later date but that's another story.

Moral of the story: Seabee people are more than willing to go the extra mile for another Seabee owner. I have never met a bunch of guys willing to do so much for anyone with a Seabee. We truly are family.

The strandeer's made it back to North Carolina the following day and I'm sure the Seabee was taken apart right then to begin repairs. Mechanic "A" is well known to the Seabee community and has many, many hours of Seabee maintenance experience so I'm sure the newly acquired Seabee is in good hands.

By the way, the Seabee that strandeer "A" had purchased is probably the most modified Seabee on the planet. If you ever see a bunch of Seabees parked along side each other, chances are you will see it there and you will immediately know it's his. There is more instrumentation in that Seabee than I have in the A-320 I fly! It is truly beautiful.

If you ever get stranded on a river (or lake for that matter) be sure you have a lot of good help. Get people who know what they are doing. (I was just transportation but Mechanic "A" and "B" and strandeer "A" were the experts). If not you could be causing more damage to your stranded Seabee. Most times good help is just a phone call away. You may have to brave the elements or spend a night but help will be there.