

EAA Smilin Chapter 866 Newsletter

March 2022



Ray Thomas flew a Pietenpol that chapter member Jim Webb built on it's first flight. This is a picture I took that day. It's my favorite pic. of Ray.

Ray passed away on 02 21 22

Larry



Hello to all EAA Chapter Members and Friends,

Our meeting this month (Wednesday March 2nd) will feature items that you have found during aircraft inspections that could affect airworthiness. The aim is to share this information to benefit everyone, both in flying safely and in reducing costs. Please let me know if you have info to share and photos or videos are encouraged. In addition, there will be a “Bag of tricks” and a surprise video of a local event to start the meeting. I am also hoping to have a project report on a scratch build project by one of our chapter members.

BEFORE the meeting, we will have food – serving at 6:30 – so bring your appetite. Of course, after the meeting there will be food – pies and coffee. Food seems to be something we all enjoy!

As I mentioned in a previous newsletter, we will have a presenter on STOL competitions flying and aircraft modifications – but this will wait until we have enough daylight to have a cookout and a demonstration.

Details in a separate email will follow when the time is right to have the “Cape Fly Around” – airspace NOTAMs are the limiting factor on this.

**Hope to see you all at the meeting Wednesday March 2nd and again at the monthly breakfast Saturday March 5th.
Happy Flying!**

February Breakfast



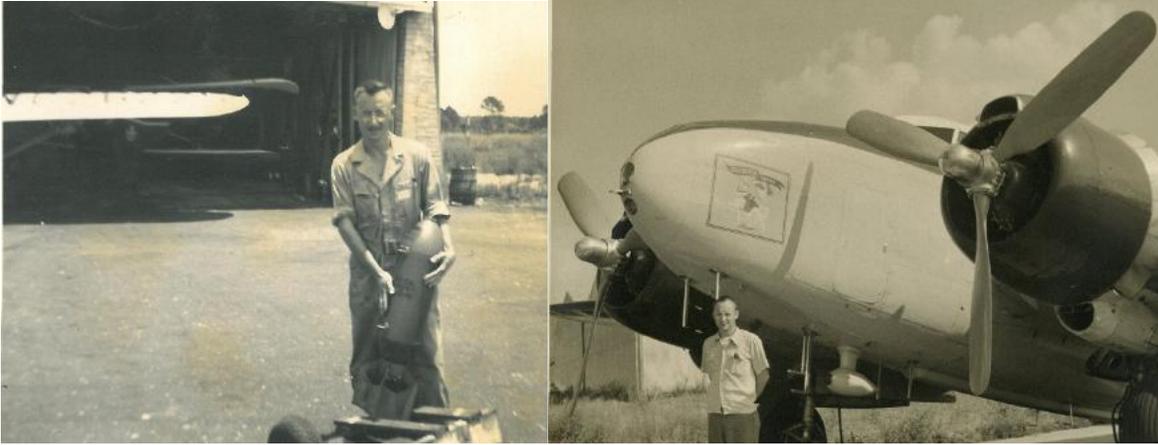
Richard holds umbrella over his wife Deborah while she tends to the egg grill

Rain drops keep falling on the eggs and along comes a fella with a big umbrella -- what a guy!

Little rain came around at our last breakfast and we had to move all the eaters (75) inside. Left the cookers outside, we can handle it!

The Member spotlight this month is on our Chapter Secretary – Richard Van Treuren

Unknown to me, Richard was a Buckeye. Born in Cincinnati, his aviation connection actually began with his father, “Van,” back in the 1930s. Van was a natural born mechanic with a successful auto repair shop, but working on airplanes at the Asheville, NC city strip led to his being bitten by the flying bug. A self-taught pilot, Van and partners built and towed gliders with their Curtiss Robin until WWII. Then too old (30!) Van joined the Civil Air Patrol and flew patrols out of Daytona Beach. By 1943 the CAP was relieved by the Navy, Van becoming a Chief Aviation Mechanic crewing on R4Ds. Postwar, Van stayed with aviation, flying executive-conversion Hudson’s for Champion Papers.



That C.A.P. 100 lb. bomb would have sure scared them Nazi U-boats! Postwar, Philip Van Treuren worked his way up to chief pilot of a five-airplane department.

Transferred to Dairypack in Ohio, Richard came along and recalls his first flight at age three, in the company’s award-winning Beech 18. (Each seat had a gum dispenser, wow, and the lakes below were made of gold!) By 1959 Champion closed down aviation and Richard’s parents divorced, while Van found a pilot-mechanic position flying a Travel Air for a Cleveland construction firm. Later, moving back with his dad, the Furguson company had upgraded to a Queen Air. Richard got to go along on some trips, such as major overhaul missions. Meanwhile Van had always wanted a Curtiss Robin like they’d once had. Finding a barely flyable one in Florida once owned by a rum runner, Van restored it and Richard got experience when accompanying the antique to Ottumwa and the like. At that time enamored with the TV show “Star Trek,” Richard had whittled out a model of the show’s shuttle-craft when no plastic model was manufactured.



Three-year-old Richard held by Mom before his first flight, family day. A Quiet Birdmen hangar party at CLE showed the fresh film of the moon landing as Richard bid his King-Air-flying Dad and the Robin goodbye for boot camp.

Never seeming to get around to formal pilot training, Richard left for San Diego Navy Training Center in 1969. Trained in Avionics at Memphis and sent to Norfolk, Richard was lucky to attend the first Star Trek Convention in NYC, where his shuttle model was featured in a magazine. Shipping out on the USS Roosevelt working on A-6As and A-6Cs, Richard was accepted in an Officer's training program and returned to San Diego. The program wasn't to Richard's liking; as a result, he was retrained for the new A-6E avionics at Whidbey Island, WA. Joining a parachute club lead to a total malfunction and hitting the reserve, curing Richard of jumping out of good airplanes. Reading a book about the Navy airships that carried airplanes, he sought out, but found little other media about them. After cruising the Pacific aboard the USS *Kitty Hawk* (CV-63), Richard finished out his service at Pt. Mugu, CA, the Pacific Missile Test Center.



First working on the A-6 Intruder aboard CVA-42, then A-6E avionics, and finally the VAST station in support of the F-14 Tomcat.

Meanwhile Richard's shuttle model article led to his meeting the owners of the full-size studio prop, the Heisman's of Los Angeles, who asked Richard to make a model for them. Driving from Pt. Mugu in his brand new 1975 VW Rabbit, Richard came to love the car's engineering and started writing the Rabbit column for the VW Club of America magazine, the VW Autoist. (Still cranking that out, 42 years later.) The long friendship with the Heisman's lead to Bob inviting Richard to family day at Downey, where North American Rockwell was building the space shuttle crew module.

Following Navy discharge Richard applied to work for the new VW Manufacturing in America. He waited for them to call at his father's home in Edgewater. (Van had retired from flying a Lear Jet in 1970). Instead of VW, Bob Heisman called; he'd come from California to help finish the first Space Shuttle, Columbia, and suggested Richard apply at Rockwell. Hired, Richard worked on the Orbiters for the next 31 years.



Just before the first launch in 1981, Richard's aft section crew is contrasted with his forward / mid section crews nearly 30 years later.

led to the altar, and their building a geodesic dome house together in Edgewater. Still finding little published about airships, Richard attended a vet's reunion which became the Naval Airship Association. Working with its members, Richard produced a five-part video series covering airship history. Richard has volunteered as Editor of the NAA's magazine, *The Noon Balloon*, since 2005.

Orbiter work evolved from everyday electrical work to an "Astronaut Crew Changeout Technician" rating. This resulted in finding Richard on the runways, Renting in Merritt Island, Richard chanced meeting local realtor Debbie Pelzer as he was finishing his book about VW Rabbits. Their friendship launch pads, Edwards AFB and White Sands. Meanwhile, since few publishers produce L-T-A titles, Rich and Deb invested in equipment to publish books, eventually creating dozens of titles for clients. Authoring two books himself, Richard elected to publish a novel, "ZRS," from an Australian writer, speculating what early WWII – warfare in the Pacific would have been like if the major powers still used a few rigid airships.



Richard with William Clarke, USS *Macon* elevatorman; Rich and Deb with some of their airship friends

Following the big layoff, Lockheed contracted Richard for two airship studies, while Debbie got the flying bug. Hoping to make a motion picture of "ZRS" they hit on the idea of building a Silence Twister to play the role of the airship's defensive fighter, since it closely resembles the design that would have been built had not USS *Macon* been lost in 1935.



2011-2017 Twister build at home finally resulted in trailering to Oshkosh to display next to Andy McKee, who'd flown his from England to attend.

Sometimes reflecting on how far a wooden model can take a person, Rich and Deb still hope to have the Twister star in the movie someday, but in the meantime enjoy the fellowship of EAA 866 Smilin' Jack.

Richard V, our Chapter Secretary – a wealth of skills and knowledge, and a great joke teller!

The Party

Our 22nd annual Winter party held on January 29th at Indian River Preserve was nice! Food was good and we had a nice band for dancing and a good time for all!

Ray Thomas had donated his prized EAA leather to the chapter and it was decided to hold a silent auction for it. Chapter member Ott Thiele had the winning bid that I believe was \$325.00. The jacket fits him perfectly and during the winter months you'll see Ott wearing the jacket while flying his gorgeous Gyroplane!



Ott Thiel successful bidder on the jacket



Kathy Anderson models the EAA leather jacket donated by Ray Thomas.



Tango

So, we've done a couple longer XCs and everything appears to be working like it's supposed to. By now the new cylinder should be broken in and I'm going to drain and replace the oil and filter then cut the filter open to examine for metal and stuff plus send a sample of the oil to a lab to have analyzed. The one issue that's holding all of this up is that there are no oil filters available from my regular sources and I've had one on BO from Aircraft Spruce for weeks now!

We had a nice trip to Tampa North Aero (X39), at Wesley Chapel, FL a couple of weeks ago. Interesting place to land because when your GPS tells you that you have arrived there doesn't seem to be an airport there! Most of us who made the trip had a time finding the strip. The runway markings are all gone, the runway is only 50' wide with no taxiways and the runway starts about 6 inches from a major highway! Anyway when I was looking at the possible locations I spotted an airplane on the ground next to this long driveway and landed on it. Then it was all fun and we had a meal at The Hangar Café and yukking it up with friends.



Ray Thomas

By Larry Gilbert

He learned to fly in the 1940s getting his private license, then doing a stint in the Army in 1944, I think. Upon discharge from the Army he earned his commercial, instrument and multi engine ratings and flight instructor at Perdue University. He began flying corporate for a couple of different companies after this and in the mean time he taught his uncle to fly in a new Piper J3 Cub that he owned. Then eventually wound up flying for a regional airline called Lake Central then Allegheny Airlines then owned by Roscoe Turner who pinned a 5 year service award medal on Rays uniform jacket. Roscoe was a legend in his time! Allegheny merged with U S Air and Ray flew as captain for them until his retirement. While he was flying for the airlines and living in New Hampshire he bought the J3 Cub from his uncle. He brought the Cub with him when he moved to Titusville. It was and still is, hangared at Dunn.

Several of us lucky individuals at Dunn had the privilege of flying with Ray in his plane. I started flying with him around the year 2000 or 2001 and all of my flight reviews were done by Ray, some in my planes and a couple in the J3 up until my current review. His favorite thing to demonstrate was what he called the “Huntin Camp Stall”! He told me a story about 4 airline pilots who were flying in a C172 (airplane was probably over gross wt.) and were being shown by the PIC the hunting camp that he had somewhere. They were flying around the camp at a not so high altitude and banking the plane a little steep and the pilot had the controls a little crossed up, Ray said. This resulted in an accelerated stall and they screwed the 172 into the ground! The demo he did with my C172 which was well below gross wt. impressed me a lot! We were at a safe altitude when he did this and what a surprise it was when it stalled and went over the top and started to spin!



With Ray at the controls an airplane was poetry in motion! Everything he did seemed so effortless and he described all the maneuvers as he did them. Sometimes I couldn't detect any control movement at all!

As a result of failing eyesight Ray had to give up his PIC privileges and he took a partnership on with Ben Charvet and Kathy Anderson so he could continue to fly the beloved Cub with his partners. About a year ago when Ray could no longer get in the plane, Ben and Kathy sold their partnership to Lenny Duncil and that new partnership began.

Around last November Ray became more ill and was no longer able to come to the airport any longer and could fly no more!



This is a picture of a poster that was on the inside of the outhouse of the farm in Michigan where Ray grew up. This was in the late 1930s and might be some of what inspired him to become a pilot.



He's Gone West now and flying higher than ever! 1927 – 2022

**There will be a memorial service for Ray on Thurs. March 03, 2022, 10:00 am
at North Brevard Funeral Home (Rt US 1 across from Alligator Plumbing, Titusville, FL)**

Chapter Officers

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Newsletter Editor	Larry Gilbert	321 747 8576	larryglbrt@gmail.com

Chapter Meeting
Weds. March 2, 7pm
6:30 Food, Pie + Coffee
Bldg. 10, Dunn Airpark
Titusville, Fl

Chapter Breakfast
Sat. March 5, 8:00 am
Bldg. 10, Dunn Airpark
Titusville, Fl

