



The Landing Field



NEWSLETTER of the Friends of Jenny educational organization

Issue 001, Winter 2015



From the Cockpit by C. Dorian Walker, Jenny Aviator

We've been talking about this for quite a while, and after two full flying seasons it seems about time. The view from the cockpit metaphorically suggests 'the best view in the house', and this regular feature plans to support that notion as best as this writer can accommodate. But, I would be remiss to not share the fact that with the Jenny, this view has been experienced for more than one hundred years, written about, photographed, lauded in prose, and been the subject of heartless newspaper obituaries. Yesterday, I took the time to calculate the Jenny hours I've collected over these past two flying seasons and although often times minutes felt like hours, it appears that to date I've lived through 186.4 flying hours. That's suspended for the most part above the earth's surface by a pair of forty two foot wooden wings strung together by a mile of cable and a few prayers. I call this mass of early 20th century aeronautical engineering 'the ole girl'. The ole girl has been good to me, but not without a few close calls, although she always seemed to know better than me, and I often claim that I was merely 'along for the ride.' Nonetheless, she took care of me. And in this column, my goal is to share with all aviation aficionados, a view from the cockpit that perhaps, in some cases, might be unique to this century old flying machine. I plan to invite other Jenny pilots, both past and present, to share their experiences flying 'the ole girl'. But I'm first up. This is a short story that occurred on a long (for us) cross country flight of about 325 miles. We were heading west, and made it about half way. After our second fuel stop I noticed an almost imperceptible loss of engine power. Since I was flying at about 1500 feet and about 50 miles from my next planned fuel stop, I began searching quickly for alternative landing fields, hopefully a 'real' airport as opposed to the infamous cow pastures that Jennies were known to regularly visit. Paducah, Kentucky appeared the closest, about 12 miles to the northwest. Like the Jennies of old, ours did not have a radio (this has since changed), but I did have what no former Army aviator or old Mail pilot had... an i-phone. And more importantly, a cracker-jack ground crew that regularly travels with our Jenny. I immediately texted the problem to Gary, our CCC (chief crew chief) who upon receiving my text, called Paducah tower and asked for prevailing winds and the active runway. By the time Paducah arrived on my horizon, I had a plan to land with





about a 30 degree cross wind of 9 knots. Landing in any cross wind in a Jenny can be a thrill of a lifetime, but given the knowledge that my engine was continuing to lose power, just reaching Paducah was the first order of business. And I did. Fortunately, I and the ole girl survived the landing. The folks at Midwest Aviation opened their doors, hangers, and hearts as the ground crew began pouring over possible problems. Two days later, a faulty valve was discovered and a new cylinder head was ordered. Needless to say, despite the long

hours of work by our terrific ground crew, now including Jon and Alan, we were not destined to make the two Air shows that were scheduled for this trip. The part ordered, we all went back to our respective homes until the new head arrived the middle of the next week. Gary and I returned to Paducah and installed the part. After test flying the ole girl, circling the field to make sure she had the power and grace to turn back east and homeward, I wagged her wings and set my compass heading to 090. Like so many stories of Jenny pilots that I had read, flying the ole girl with any regularity and dependability was not often at the top of the experiences she afforded. On the way and anxious to get back to her home base, I wrote this summary and sent it to my family...



From dawn to dusk, we worked two days to improve the engine performance

Dear Family,

This morning was a stunning trip, flying straight into the rising sun, wisps of fog hovering over the wide Tennessee River. A wag of my wings at the river boat captain 500 feet below turned loose a wisp of white smoke from his whistle as Jenny's strong engine churned on. Two geese flew nearby, I'm sure, wondering what type of large yellow bird God had put before them this morning. And later as I approached to land, pulling back on the throttle, dipping the nose downward, Jenny's roar and vibration were replaced with her wing wires singing in the wind as she smoothly set her gaze at the town below and runway ahead. Just another day at the office! Jenny and pilot are safe and back on the ground at our home airfield.



Family Stories

This section of our Newsletter focuses on real life stories, gathered and submitted by people who have had or known someone who has had a past experience with the Jenny.



"Just don't ever cook goat",

declared by a young WW1 pilot on his return from France. This directive came as he asked his sweetheart to marry him. Remarkably, she said yes. At least that's the family story shared with the FOJ team as we exhibited the ole girl on sacred Jenny flying ground of Wright Patterson's National Air Force Museum. Our new found friend and her son visited with us and shared many stories about her father, who had learned to fly in a Jenny. But it was this story that intrigued us. We waited patiently to hear the connection, and finally

asked her to elaborate. She smiled and retold the story. On the grass fields of France where her father had flown, they required maintenance like all grass fields. This was no John Deere tractor and mower available, so the French used goats to keep the fields trimmed nicely. The only problem was that the goats didn't receive the briefing on when our Aero squadrons would take to the sky and return. The departures were fairly easy to figure out because of the racket and commotion caused by all those Nieuports and Spads taxiing and taking off. However the returns were often a bit of a surprise when nothing but the wind through flying wires would have alerted them to the aircraft's return from battle. Not to worry, the unsuspecting goat which found itself suddenly no longer among the living, would soon be featured on the local mess sergeant's menu that evening. Apparently her father's squadron was a little too proficient and their mess cook prepared goat just about every way known to his expanding culinary genius. Reluctantly, her mother consented to his demand!

Did you know?

The JN-4 was an improved version of the earlier JN-2 which Glenn Curtiss first built in 1916. It was powered by the newly-designed Curtiss OX-5 V8 90 hp engine, and had a top speed of around 75 mph. It was a well-constructed plane with a dependable engine, but it was mostly wings and tended to be temperamental about landing. Many pilots jokingly commented that this made it a good trainer, because "If you can fly a Jenny, you can fly anything!"

Source: Glenn H. Curtiss Museum



Maintenance Hanger

Winter is upon us and it's a little cold to fly comfortably in an open cockpit. Perfect time for maintenance. During February, we plan to refurbish our engine side cowls. Two years of constant vibration has made them authentic by all counts. So Jon and team have agreed to remake them. Brian Karli has lent us his louver making form to do this like it was done in the old days. We plan to perform a once over cleaning of all hardware and replace the landing gear shock cord (bungee cord) after 94 landings. Last time we did this job, it took four of us including our strong mountain man A&P friend Joe just under four hours to replace both sides. We currently use a Maule tail wheel that bolts on to our original tail skid (so that we have the option of using the skid on grass runway demonstrations) but have acquired the tail dragger's favorite 'Scott' tail wheel to replace it. Myron has made the Scott 'new' by rebuilding it. We anticipate even better tail wheel performance with this change. During this time we will also pull the valve covers and perform our regular 25 hour inspection.



Whose that sitting in the Jenny?'

There are a lot of folks who claim that sitting in a Jenny is on their bucket list, so we thought we'd just take a look at some of those future Jenny flyers.



The Navy flew Jenny's as part of their WW1 training program. And the Jenny still fascinates Navy pilots, even today. Meet Lt. 'Swampy' Ashley Waddle, who normally flies FA-18F Hornets. She said she LOVES the Jenny... imagine landing one on a carrier. After all, Glenn Curtiss is the father of Naval Aviation!