

Keith's Corner/McGill News

July 23, 2021

The WWI Aviator

The year was 1966 and I was working in the Sacramento, Ca. Office of the large scientific equipment supplier, Van Waters & Rogers. I was one of three outside salesmen and my territory was everything north of Sacramento to the Oregon border. Being from a small town, my boss jokingly referred to me as the "small town kid"

One day an older gent came into the office and wanted to buy an old time analytical balance. The gent was wearing overalls and looked like he was from the country, so my boss of course asked me to humor the old gent. The other two salesmen snickered a little. I had the man follow me into my office and shut the door. I could see the city folks in the office all having quite a laugh.

The old balance he wanted was being replaced everywhere with the new Mettler Torsion ones. He didn't want one. We had a bunch of the old ones from the University of Cal that were in the process of being destroyed as per contract. I promised to get him one of those. The boss had a fit, but let me have one after swearing me to secrecy. It was to humor me.

Upon arriving at the old man's house, he had me set the balance up and test it in a large metal building. There was an elaborate chem lab set up there. He was doing advanced metallurgical chemistry for several gold mining companies. He had received one of the first college degrees in that field in the US. There was also a large racing speedboat and an old bi-wing plane in the building. He told me that the govt. had taken his pilot's license and so he turned to speedboats. He had to be in his eighties, at least.

We then went into his house so he could pay me for the balance. He would not accept it without paying. He poured us about 2 fingers of bourbon. While sitting at the kitchen table I noticed a small old time wooden propeller hanging on the

wall. One side of it was broken off. He told me that he was a member of a group of former WWI fighter pilots and that he was one of the last ones still alive. After the war several of them formed a “flying circus” and they “barnstormed” all over the world. He showed me pictures of him flying a bi-plane into the side of a large barn and some of them “wing walking”. He was also a test pilot for several airplane companies. Many of those early planes ended up crashing out of control, but with the slow speeds involved, he walked away from them.

We chatted away the afternoon and reluctantly I had to leave. As we walked thru the living room, he stopped at an old roll top desk and pulled out an envelope that was slightly yellowed from age. It contained a certificate that stated that he had performed the necessary requirements to be a full fledged pilot. It was signed by one of the Wright brothers, I don’t remember which one. He let me hold it and read it. I was not only stunned, but felt so honored to hold such a piece of history. To this day, 55 years later I still feel that way. I think of the other folks in the office back then, that due to their city arrogance, they missed out on meeting such a man that lived life to the fullest. He lived thru a dangerous part of history and was in on the ground floor of the aviation industry. He was one of those guys that put his life on the line for us.

McGill News

FINALLY, our local area has a new newspaper. It is called, the—BRISTLECONE TRIBUNE--. It is owned and edited by Teresa Stewart.

Publishing a newspaper is not an easy thing, but Teresa has done a remarkable job. It is refreshing to see something new and great.

Her readership is growing by leaps and bounds.

She is adding, ‘Keith’s Corner’ this Friday.

The Bristlecone Tribune, comes out every Friday and is found on local news stands. It can be delivered right to your home for a nominal fee of \$50 for a whole year. What a bargain. Mail delivery is also available. Details and subscription information can be had at —teresa.bristleconetribune@gmail.com-- or phone 775-293-2240.

Teresa is doing a fantastic job, so let’s all support her.

Oldies

1909—April 16---Mr. W. F. Cross is new mgr. at Steptoe Drug, (McGill Drug).

1910—April 10—Steptoe Valley Meat store opens in McGill

Old Photo

