



*The City of Yuma is refueled in flight. It required the help and cooperation of many people to keep plane in air.*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY EMTL EGER, JR.

## Flight of the City of Yuma

BY SAMUEL A. SICILIANO

Bob Woodhouse and Woody Jongeward are a couple of young men just about like any of hundreds of young men in Yuma, Arizona. They mutter a little each morning when the alarm rings them out of a sound sleep, share breakfast with their wives and make their way to their jobs. Both pass the time of day socially and commercially with hundreds of friends each day, Bob at his station in a garage parts department and Woody at his electric shop.

But there is a bit of a difference. Bob and Woody are a bit distinctive. Perhaps it doesn't mean too much, mentioned off-handedly. But if you give it a little thought they are *really* different. Bob and Woody, you see, hold the distinction of being out of touch with terra firma for a longer period of time than any other men since the beginning of time!

Yes, Bob and Woody piloted The City of Yuma, the little, two-place converted Aeronca airplane, to a new endurance flight record of 1124 hours, 14 minutes and five seconds and put another feather into the already multi-feathered Arizona cap. Eleven-hundred, twenty-four hours, etc. is over 46 days of sustained flight, well over a month of being hemmed in on all sides by bits of metal and treated fabric and completely enveloped, including underneath, by nothing but air. They travelled more than 90,000 miles, almost four times around the earth at its

equatorial puffed out middle and they did most of it within fifteen miles of home.

Now that was just a briefing to bring back memories of the same facts you heard, many times over your radios and read even more times in your newspapers while the flight was in progress. That's just to set the scene, as it were, for the real story of The City of Yuma. The story that wasn't spoken over your radio, wasn't written in your newspaper.

And now that the hub-bub and confusion of the flight's actuality has murmured itself into memory, now that Bob and Woody have signed their names, autographically, more times than a movie star on a personal appearance tour, it is time to tell that story.

Many have wondered just how one goes about conducting an endurance flight. Some wave it off with a flip of the hand and mutter, "Get yourself an airplane, press the button, and there you are." Others just shake their heads in amazement and say, "Beats me." So, for the edification of the hand flippers and the education of those who haven't any idea where to begin, let's take a look at The City of Yuma from the time she (figuratively) took the air from the back seat of an automobile travelling from Yuma to Parker, Arizona.

There were four men in the car that afternoon. The

car was one of several carrying Yuma businessmen to Parker, at the northern extreme of the county, for a Chamber of Commerce get-together. Horace Griffen, auto dealer, was driving and F. C. "Frosty" Braden, Chamber president, was at his side. In the rear seat was a young electrician, Woody Jongeward, and riding with him was Ray Smucker, radio station manager and the man every Yuman thinks of first whenever the word "promotion" is mentioned.

It's almost a hundred miles to Parker and subject number forty-seven under discussion was two men, Burris and Reidel, who were on their successful way to a new light plane endurance flight record of 1008 hours.

"You know," said Smucker, "there's a lot of publicity in one of these flights. Wish we could have one in Yuma. We'd show the world that we have the only 365 flying day year to be found."

Jongeward looked over, "Get me the plane and a partner and I'll try one for you."

One mili-second later The City of Yuma did its figurative takeoff in Ray Smucker's mind and three minutes of conversation after that he had outlined his plan to the other three.

It was almost six months later that the wheels of the plane really said farewell to the ground for the third and successful attempt. And, in round figures, it took six hundred people to turn the trick.

Now six hundred seems quite a number of people for even so large an undertaking as an endurance flight. But let us add the services needed, and the attendant number for each service, as the sponsors of the flight, The Yuma Junior Chamber of Commerce, had to add at each of the meetings following the presentation of the idea to the organization.

The meetings were held in the office of P. C. Byrne, Yuma attorney, for the boys realized that a legal mind would be needed. A partner was found for Woody—Bob Woodhouse, like Woody, an ex-Navy pilot. A plane was found, a sponsoring oil company to furnish fuel. Marsh aviation turned over its hangar facilities and mechanical know-how. Arrangements were made with a local restaurant to furnish food, a doctor volunteered his services to make sure the boys were in condition for the ordeal.

Local stores were contacted and were pleased to contribute anything that would help, all the way from two pairs of fur-lined slippers to the fishing pole needed by the refueling crews to rest against the wing of the plane during refueling operations to ground the static electricity.

The gears of publicity started turning when Yuma newspaper and radiomen made reporting the event a part of their regular daily routine and photographers gave of their time, film and flashbulbs to produce the pictures that went to papers all over the country along with the stories the publicity crew wrote.

Western Union men were on hand for official timing and Civil Aeronautics Authority set its radios so that constant contact could be maintained with the plane.

Police and sheriff's offices were visited next and both forces set into motion the pattern for handling the volume of traffic everyone knew would be on hand for the refueling operations. Insurance men were called upon to set up proper coverage for the principals involved and clearances for the necessary low flying were obtained.

Next came the most important step—the choosing of the refueling crews. These men had to agree to what

almost amounted to an enlistment for armed service. The plane would need to be refueled three times daily from a car travelling 80 miles an hour and requiring stopping with only inches to spare. The lives of each four man crew depended upon the driver's skill and the success of the flight depended upon the dexterity of the crewmen who passed the necessities of life to the flyers. And each man *had to be there* for each of the well over 1500 "passes" required to break the record. Every morning at four a.m. the low, sleek convertible refueling car shot its way through the darkness of an inky morning to pass up food and enough fuel to last until the regular 8:00 a.m. refueling. Then each evening at 5:30 p.m. the process of refueling was repeated. At no time during the entire flight was there an opportunity for the refueling crew to skip its chore. And at no time during the entire flight was there ever a bit of anything but perfect flying weather.

And at each refueling operation the term "strictly a man's world" was forgotten for Mrs. Woodhouse and Mrs. Jongeward made each roaring ride down the runway and every morning saw them exchanging letters with their flying husbands.

Speaking of the two girls, there is also a story attached to the "consent" needed by the two boys to make the attempt. But the twinkle in the eyes of both Bob and Woody as they answer questions on that phase of the operation precludes any further delving. Suffice to repeat the answer the boys gave, "The less said the better."

So, that is the story behind the story of The City of Yuma. That is the reason for the claim that it took 600 people to make the flight a success. And, if you want to count all the good wishes, the prayers, all the hopes for success you would have to say it took 15,000 people. That, you see, is the number of people in Yuma.

*Bob and Woody are Yuma's record-breaking endurance fliers. Were off the earth longer than anyone in history.*

