

By Don Bedwell &  
John Dorschner

His thinning hair shielded from the bay wind by a crushed flying cap, Dean Franklin was standing in front of the tiny terminal of Chalk's Flying Service on Watson Island. Near the hut, at water's edge, were the six small amphibian planes that Franklin operates for owner "Pappy" Chalk. Across the water, passengers were slipping aboard a gleaming-white cruise ship.

Suddenly, its gigantic jet engines roaring, a 747 jumbo jet sped over the bay, climbed high over Miami Beach and then, in a slow, elegant curve, turned northward.

Looking at the monstrous jet disappearing in the distance, Franklin scratched the ground for a second, then said: "Oh, I suppose that eventually, if I live long enough, we'll expand. If we just have to, why, we have to. It may be forced on us by competition." Franklin's voice had the tone of doom, as if he were talking about a nuclear holocaust. "The secret of our success is that we never had much money . . ."

Success? Well, yes — of a sort. For more than 50 years, Chalk's Flying Service has been waging a vigorous defense of the status quo — and winning. It has been a hard fight for what is quite possibly the world's oldest surviving airline. Logic suggests that such an old carrier would rank up there with the Pan Americans and the Lufthansas — or else

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would have folded its hangar eons ago. But then, Chalk's has never owned a hangar to fold.

Pappy Chalk, now pushing 83 and his memory beginning to fade, can't swear by the exact date, but he's certain that he started his flying service in Miami during the summer of 1919. If he's right, then Chalk's predates even KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, acknowledged as the world's oldest, and Avianca of Colombia, considered No. 2. (KLM signed its memorandum of association in The Hague on October 7, 1919. Avianca was founded two months later — on December 5.)

Yet Chalk's has made waves only in Biscayne Bay, and not in the airline industry. It schedules only two regular flights a day — a morning and an afternoon round-trip between Miami and Bimini. Its only other business is charter trips to the Bahamas and the Keys.

At Chalk's, bigness is about as desirable as a blown piston in one of the throbbing rotary engines. "We could never expand too rapidly, so we entered new markets only when we were sure there was a need. We didn't just start flying anywhere," says Franklin, who was in knickers when the airline began.

"One thing you can say about us that you can't say about any other airline is that we've never lost money," boasts Franklin. "We started with nothing, but now we don't owe anybody anything. Why, even our planes are all paid for."

Not only is it debt-free, it's

also death-free. "We've been flying 'em over and back for 51 years, and we haven't hurt anyone yet," boasts Chalk. Rare instances of mechanical troubles have bugged the aging amphibians, but the planes have put down at sea without so much as getting a passenger damp. "It's just like carrying your own airport with you," says Jim Garlitz, one of Chalk's pilots.

In Miami, the service's terminal nestles against the bay, dwarfed by its Watson Island neighbor, the Goodyear blimp. The small structure was built in 1936 by Pappy Chalk himself, using the area's coral rock. Though there has been a recent addition, Chalk's terminal is still considered the smallest port of entry in the United States.

Inside, behind a small wooden counter, a cheerful blonde sells tickets: It's \$36, including taxes, for a round-trip to Bimini. Behind her, their feet resting on the office desks, the maintenance men sip coffee and swap stories about the weather.

The passengers pay in cash (American Express is "too much paperwork"), and the blonde gives them in return a simple blue piece of cardboard. That's the ticket.

While waiting for the flight, passengers have nothing more to do than sit on the enameled wooden benches and look at the pictures on the walls of trophy fish and Pappy shaking hands with acquaintances down through the years.

The restless can wander outside to examine the planes: The four "new" 16-passenger Grumman Mallards and the two 10-

passenger Grumman Gooses ("Geese" isn't good form, according to Franklin). The Gooses date back to the 1930's. Grumman discontinued the Mallard line in the early 1950's.

"They're getting pretty scarce," Franklin admits. During the past two years, when Chalk's had to expand (though ever so slightly), it had to go halfway around the world to get four Grumman Mallards at \$150,000 apiece from Japan Air Lines.

"Those Grummans are real rugged planes," boasts Franklin, who has become such an expert that he has opened his own repair shop in Miami — Dean Franklin Aviation Enterprises. Fourteen employes work there overhauling the old Grumman Gooses, Widgeons and Mallards. When a Grumman amphibian goes down anywhere in the world, a Franklin representative shows up to buy the salvaged parts. He has the market so locked up that he can boast, "I even sell to Grumman."

When it's time to climb aboard, the pilot shouts a comradely "let's go," and the passengers troop out to the navy-blue and yellow amphibians.

After everyone has squeezed in, the pilot checks the seating arrangements. "Now," he says, "how about if you two guys at the back come up to these two front seats? It'd help the weight." Two men, dressed in floral sports shirts and bermudas, dutifully move forward.

The pilot starts the engines and slips the plane down the cement ramp and into the bay.

"OK, make sure those seat-

'The only sound is  
an occasional boat'

**GOLDEN**

*Continued*

willing to move, and often a Golden Beach house is sold only after the owner dies. "Real estate moves very slowly here," says Nicholas Berkos, the town's long-time mayor. "We don't care. We're happy to have anybody build here, but we don't seek them out."

Though definitely not a Hobe Sound nor a Palm Beach, a list of the town's residents includes an interesting cross-section of the nation's industrial — if not social — elite. Raymond Firestone, president and chairman of the board of Firestone Tire and Rubber Co., has a home there valued at \$685,000 (without land cost). Other residents include Mrs. Sara Fisher, the widow of Charles Fisher of Fisher Auto Body; Carroll Rosenbloom, owner of the Baltimore Colts; Fred Zollner of the Zollner Piston Corp. and the Detroit Pistons basketball team; and Sonny Werblin, former owner of the New York Jets and owner of the Music Corporation of America.

"We've got DuPonts and Vanderbilts here," boasts Mayor Berkos, who owns Space Magnetics in Fort Lauderdale.

Many Golden Beachers are also Golden Agers, and the town has the sedate touch of a semi-retirement community. There is a playground for youngsters, but the unscuffed hobbyhorses and the meticulously cut grass give little indication of children's wear and tear.

More use is made of the town beach and bathhouse, open only to residents and their guests. There, they bask in the sun and discuss the peculiar problems of their community: The lack of servants ("the women are having to buy cookbooks"), soaring taxes ("the infernal revenue"), the commercial development that threatens Golden Beach from the north and south and the fact that they just don't make limousines like they used to.

During the hot summer months, as many as half the residents will escape to cooler climes. Golden Beach becomes an elegant ghost town.

Even in winter, the community runs as quietly as a Rolls Royce. "You can't even hear a train whistle from Golden Beach," says Berkos. "The only thing is a boat going by once in a while. I found complete tranquillity here, and yet if we want to have a night on the town, we're only 20 minutes away from it. If you want to raise hell, you can raise hell."

DuPont-forbid if anyone tries to raise hell in Golden Beach itself. In 1959, there was a momentary break in the decorum when a couple of Miami gamblers rented a temporarily vacated house on the ocean front and set up a swank casino, complete with food and drink. Within a week, police had discovered the operation and closed it down. "That's about the most exciting thing that's happened around here," sighs Laurita Chapman, the town's deputy clerk and 20-year resident of the city.

Especially quiet is the town's government, which doesn't even report its election results to the media. "They're not interesting to the general public," says the mayor, "and we like to stay out of the

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# Is This Any Way To Run The World's Oldest Airline?

You bet it is — if you're Pappy Chalk, and are more interested in the adventure of operating six small amphibians in Biscayne Bay than in going along with the high-flying demands of a think-big industry