

## Antilles Airboats

a lifetime of influence and admiration that almost felt like family to me

There are many people in my dad's family I didn't know personally, they lived far away and we didn't get to see them often if at all. They were many that inspired my dad throughout his life; growing up, school and his flying career. From his stories they were all like an extended family to me knowing how much dad admired and respected them. My dad knew Charlie Blair fairly well and flew with him for many years at Pan American World Airways. There were lots of Charlie stories.

I was raised near the water on Long Island, NY. We grew up around boats and there were many airline pilots in our area. We were right next to the Vanderbilt museum and they had a model of a boat that used to grace Northport harbor that carried a Grumman Duck on the yacht. The waterfront hangar was part of the museum and as kids we played on the beach looking up at this massive hangar built into the hill with its Belgium Block constructed ramp. With boats, airplanes, cars so much a part of my young life, the '50 and '60 were great times growing up, though I'm not sure I ever really did. Well, one of our PAA neighbors, an avid sailor, was moving to Nevis, so one year when I was about 16 we headed to the islands to check things out.

The first night of our vacation in St. Croix was in Christensted and I remember standing on the pool deck above the ramp of the seaplane base the next morning as we watched a Grumman Goose circle over head and land in the bay coming straight at us. It taxied up the ramp below us, swung the tail around and I can still remember the sound of the radial engines shutting down. Some cute young girls in white shorts and airline shirts ran out to greet the airplane with leis and a red carpet. As I'm standing there in awe my dad put his arm around my shoulder and said, "Son, graduate from HS with your commercial and instrument and you can come down here and fly for Charlie on summer breaks between semesters in college." I was hooked!

As things turned out, that didn't happen. I got my ratings, but college was interrupted by Viet Nam. By the time I finished school and got back in the job market, the airlines were not hiring. My good friend from the Army John Delamater had gone to work for Cousteau and later at AAB as a mechanic. The dream of flying for Charlie was fading away, John had reported that the airline was not doing well. I finally was able to get on with an airline but never really had

any interest in flying my own airplane. Of course, that all changed when I flew a seaplane.

I was about 52 when we acquired our Republic Super Seabee. I was amazed at what I'd been missing all those years. I could only imagine what it might have been like to be a part of AAB back in the day. Many years later I met the son of another PAA pilot that had flown for Charlie. It seemed to be a pretty small world and I was not the only one to have been so influenced by such a great vision. I can only imagine how many must have been influenced by their exposure.

Life is amazing. They speak of the theory of only 6 degrees of separation. In aviation it must be much less. That young boy on the pool deck about 54 years ago finally got the opportunity to fly one of Charlie's geese. It was Charlie's first or second Goose. This past summer I flew with Addison Pemberton in N95467 after it's been completely restored. WOW! Not only does the aircraft live, but Addison's admiration is infectious and brings it all back to life as he speaks of the history of the airplane, AAB and Charlie.



Thanks again for all your efforts on this website.

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