

The 'Amphibian Man' Turns to New Fields as Ducks Fade

By DON BEDWELL
Herald Aviation Writer

Mustachioed Dean H. Franklin, who hunts ducks that look like flying boats, cornered the Grumman Goose market back during the Korean war.

But years pass and Frank-

lin, who is also big in Mallards and Widgeons, says he's diversifying his business now as the market for the vintage aircraft dries up.

He may even have to skip a decade and jump directly from old amphibians into

aerospace contracting.

For years Franklin's Miami-based Gander Aircraft Corp. has been virtually the only source of parts and major overhaul for Grumman's line of amphibians, built between 1937 and the late 1940s.

"I even sell to Grumman," Franklin can boast.

For 35 years Franklin has piloted flying boats through the Bahamas for A. B. "Pappy" Chalk and his Chalk's Flying Service. He became a partner in that charter service, which operates off an island in Biscayne Bay, and now serves as its president.

As a sideline he established Franklin Aviation Enterprises and its "wholly owned manufacturing subsidiary," Gander Aircraft, incorporated in 1959.

The name is more than just a play on words, derived from the "Gooses" (Geese?) and "Mallards" upon which it lives.

"Gander was to be the name of a modified Goose, souped up with 550-horsepower Lycoming engines," Franklin said. "That project was scrapped after my partner, Dr. Herbert Eicker, died in a 1959 auto accident."

But the firm went into many other — could you say wings? — of the business, offering repairs, parts and such redesigned versions as the Super Widgeon, 12 of which were built. With new engines, Franklin squeezed 40 additional miles an hour out of the Widgeons, giving them a cruising speed of 160.

"After World War II I bought up all the surplus parts for these planes I could find," Franklin said. "At the beginning of the Korean war Grumman sold all of its parts, and I bought everything I could lay my hands on.

"We sort of have the mar-

ket cornered," he said. "We sell all over the world."

He figures about 65 of the 1930s-era Gooses are still flying, along with 175 of the later Widgeons and 52 of the post-war Mallards, the top of the line.

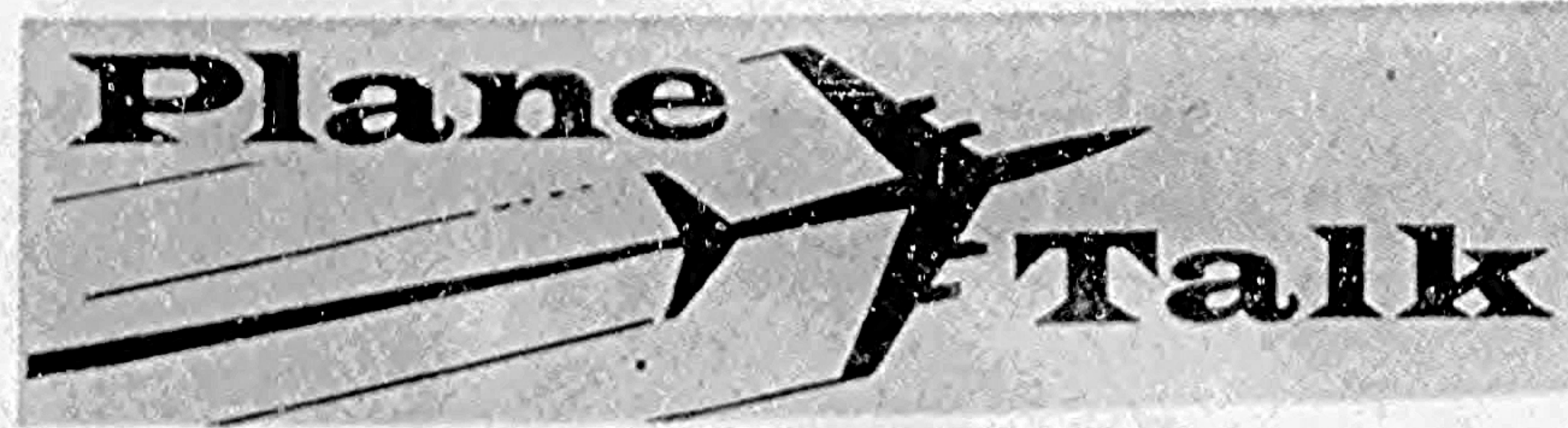
"Many of 'em are flying in Alaska and Canada, because of the value of an amphibian among all those lakes," he said. "Others are carrying passengers and cargo in places as far away as Africa."

The firm, which operates out of a 60,000-square-foot plant adjacent to Miami International Airport, replenishes its stockpile of parts whenever one of the flying boats goes down in salvageable condition.

"We try to buy up all the crashes," Franklin said. "We'll buy a tail off one, the nose off another. Our business has taken us to Canada for crashed parts, and we've even fished one out of the water off the Bahamas."

But every crash lost another customer for Franklin, who is now looking toward other fields.

"We're going out looking for prime and sub-contracts



for metal and fiberglass fabrications for either industrial firms or governmental agencies," he said. "It's likely we'll get into aerospace or oceanography."

He expects that his present 30-man staff will rise to as many as 200 within two years under John E. Dolan, imported from a firm to head up the Gander expansion.

Dolan has already converted the facility to provide engineering, design, specifications and drafting services to customers. The plant will handle fiberglass mold making, laminations and resin forming as well as packaging and containering.

Marketing consultant John N. Gibson and Wilbur K. Leu have been added to the staff,

with Gibson heading the marketing internal procedure program and Leu as director of sales.

Gander, naturally, won't turn its back on the Grumman ducks.

"There's a demand for good amphibians," Franklin says, not immodestly. "And I'm the only one who actually improved on them."

Nine Miami girls have graduated as National Airlines stewardesses: Eliza B. Billson, Susan Kay Cusmano, Andrea D. Cutler, Claudia J. Frink, Helen Sue Hopkinson, Maureen Lauth, Janet L. McLeod, Mary Jane Pitt and Cynthia Sue Rutkin. Eastern

added six local girls, Sharon E. Cassel, Ruby Gene Williams and Phyllis Ann Lane of Miami, Enid Elizabeth Dewoody and Margaret E. Lowe of Hialeah and Delores L. Pennington of North Miami. Three Miami girls, Debbie Wise, Linda Ann Whelan and Sally Griffiths, have joined Delta. Two Miami-based stews, DiAnne Neuroth and Gretchen Eickmann, have been promoted to instructors at United's stewardess training school in Chicago.



—Herald Staff Photo by BILL KUENZEL

'I Even Sell to Grumman:' Dean Franklin
... but time, crashes cramp the Widgeon market



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