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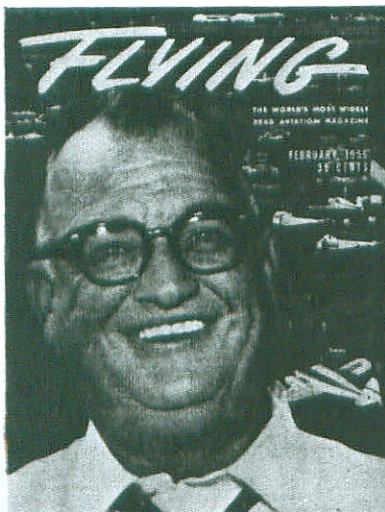
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THE COVER: Southwest Airmotive's Winston Castleberry. For more on this fabulous character, see page 22.

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# I learned about flying from that !

*A series of boners taught this fighter  
pilot to have more respect for a lowly Cub.*

By HAROLD E. McDONNELL

**P**OUR THE COAL TO IT and climb out of trouble! That was a habit I had cultivated in fighters during WW II. Prior to Cadet instruction I had lightplane experience but two years in fighters had spoiled me. In combat I had power when I needed it and subconsciously began to think all aircraft had plenty. A Piper Cub taught me the error of my ways.

After flying daily fighter-bomber missions over Italy in P-47's for almost a year, I tangled with the Cub. One of our pilots was shot down in the no-man's-land that existed while the Germans were getting pushed north in the Po Valley. He had crash-landed in a wheat field and became the object of a tank battle. The allied tanks won, picked him up and trucked him back to the Florence airfield. At the squadron we received a telephone call to pick him up.

We usually did chores like that in our utility B-25 but unfortunately the Mitchell was in check. I was asked to pick him up in a reconstructed Piper Cub that one of our crew chiefs had put together from pieces of artillery reconnaissance planes. I received a quick cockpit checkout and took off for Florence.

Compared to the overloaded fighters, the Cub became airborne without any apparent take-off run. I was amazed at the light control forces and how the plane seemed to float on every passing current. As I headed north toward Florence, I took time to try a few tight stalling turns. Otherwise, the flight north over the hills was uneventful. However, the trip took much longer than I had anticipated and I made a mental note to hurry in

order to get back to home base before dark.

The Cub was not equipped with a radio so I circled the field until I spotted the corner of the grassed section from which artillery planes were operating. It was on the far side of the fighter strip where my passenger had been instructed to wait. Taxiing around the strip was irritating and time consuming. I was still spitting dust by the time I made arrangements for refueling and had found the pilot. He was eager to get going so we quickly gathered up his chute and multitudinous souvenirs. I laughed when I saw all the trophies, knowing that he thought I would come for him in the B-25.

I wasn't concerned about the weight since the Cub had seemed so light and bouncy on the trip up. He was telling me all about his escapade as we stuffed an enemy helmet, guns, small shells, and combat boots, around him in the back seat. The downwind end of the fighter strip was nearer, so I taxied in that direction. As I came to the edge of the holding circle, the control tower flashed a red light to hold until an aircraft on the other end of the strip had taken off. Sitting still was hot and my impatience mounted as an entire squadron took off. By the time the last one had passed me, I resolved not to taxi any farther. When I received the green light to cross the strip, I turned instead down the runway and poured on the power.

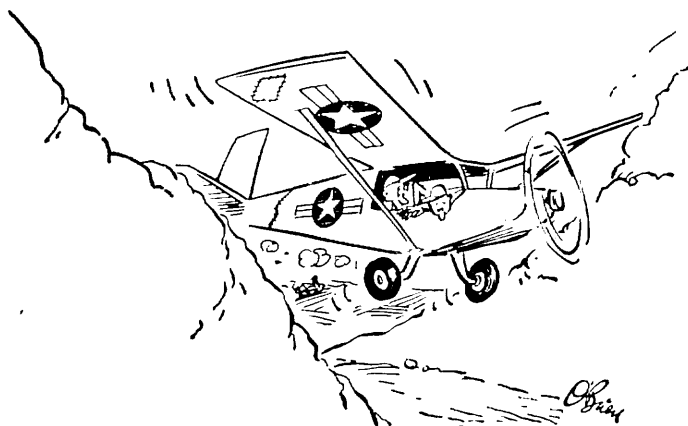
The engine turned up smoothly and I eased forward on the stick but the tail of the Cub didn't lift an inch. I pushed harder. It still didn't budge. I eased off the forward pressure. My concern mounted. I had rolled twice as far as I had estimated I would and, as I continued to roll, I spotted a C-47 taking position on the other end of the runway. The pilot apparently had not seen me or dreamed a Cub might be taking-off down wind towards him. As soon as I was indicating about three mph over stall speed, I horsed back on the stick and the plane broke ground. Simultaneously a red flare shot out of the control tower to warn the aircraft in the take-off position. Wobbling on the edge of a stall, the Cub held the air.

The plane gained about 30 feet of altitude before I felt a serious stall nibble. I eased off back stick and we barely held altitude. As smoothly as I could and as much as I dared, I eased the Cub off the runway path. Every bit of air turbulence snatched at the wings. I could do nothing but sweat out every little bubble since we were now skimming over the antennae of a row of parked P-38's. Sweat poured down my forehead into my eyes. I didn't dare move to wipe it for fear the throttle might creep back or a wing drop and we would stall in.

At this point, my pick-up, who didn't seem to realize how critical we were on flying speed, wiggled around in his seat to view the confusion we had left behind. I howled at him to sit still and stop rocking. He made a joking reply but made no further movements that I could detect so I made no further explanations. I turned my attention to the inevitable high tension wires that were strung about a quar-

ter of a mile ahead of us, above which we couldn't climb, and below which seemed to be crowded with trees. I elected to attempt a turn.

The rate of turn was almost imperceptible but it proved to be extremely fortunate. It took us over some plowed land and the up drafts lifted us (Continued on page 76)





## Hangar Flying

(Continued from page 15)

of propwash and (b) launch only when the deck is level or on an up sweep. In this case the pilot preceding my unsuspecting friend did not veer off properly. The Flight Deck Officer compounding the error launched the F6F too soon.

With a mighty roar the *Hellcat* shot into the air, hit the burbling propwash, dropped like a stone into the China Sea, caromed off the top of a wave and staggered into the air again between two wave troughs while a hundred pair of eyes stared in incredulous disbelief.

Billing is now an old man of 32 but there is doubt he will live long enough to forget the day he became the first and only man in history to take off from the water in an F6F.

SHELDON LEWIS

Elmira, N. Y.

### NEVER RELAX

IT COULDN'T HAVE been a better night for our purpose, I thought, as I watched my first student go through his pre-landing check. The blackness of the desert sky was broken only by the millions of stars overhead and the lights of Blue Auxiliary Field below us. We had a long shift ahead as this was the last scheduled night flying for the cadet class.

My first two students completed their landings in good shape and were replaced by two more. As the hours wore on, and one student after another satisfactorily completed his series of landings, I found myself relaxed and confident that this was an unusually sharp group of cadets. I was at the peak of this confidence when up jumped the devil.

It was long past midnight and most of the *Bobcats* had taken off for home when I picked up my last pair of students. Each of these boys needed just one more required landing so it would not be long before we could head for the sack. The boy I selected to fly first made an excellent take-off. About half way along the downwind leg I reached across and

pulled the right throttle all the way back, simulating an engine failure. Quickly and efficiently my student took the prescribed steps to meet the emergency.

His procedure was so letter-perfect that I was sure I had another sharpie on my hands and proceeded to assume the attitude of the confident instructor, arms folded on my chest and one foot on the instrument panel.

As our approach progressed, it seemed to me that we were going to be a little high but not dangerously high, so I waited for my student's reaction. Scarcely had the thought crossed my mind, when he chopped his power and called for full flaps. From this point on we would have a normal power-off condi-



tion, so the landing was an assured success. As we approached the airport boundary, I began calling off the airspeed as was the practice in this type of operation. "90, 90, 85, 85, 80, 80, 75, 70," and then it happened. Apparently feeling that he was too low, my student jammed full power on the left engine. Our *Bobcat* went into an uncontrolled vertical bank to the right and veered across the field. My foot came down from the panel, my right hand went for the wheel, and my left for the throttle quadrant where I jammed the right throttle wide open in an attempt to regain control.

The throttle was limp in my hand.

There was no response from the right engine! Holding the nose down to maintain what little airspeed we had, I flipped the gear and flap switches to the up position, and began groping around the throttle quadrant for the trouble. I was far too pre-occupied with the ground as it flashed by in the glare of our landing lights to risk a look inside the cockpit, but instinctively knew the trouble was there.

Just as my hand fell on the empty space where the mixture control knob should be, if it were in the rich position, my heart leaped to my throat. Dead ahead was the huge red cross which is painted on the sides of all military ambulances. Just then my left hand found the mixture control knob and I jerked it up to the full rich position. The right engine roared to life, and the right wing came up barely in time to clear the apparently-doomed vehicle. I've never relaxed with a student at the controls since that night.

JAMES B. WINSLOW

Alameda, Calif.

### SAFETY BELTS?

AS I HAVE personally inspected safety belts in many venerable planes, I feel the need to alert pilots to the fact that far too many licensed and flying aircraft have safety belts that would not stand the impact of a crash landing. In some cases I found that pilots were relying on belts that would hardly be able to hold up their trousers, let alone save their lives.

This weakness is often hidden from the eyes of the pilot, as in most cases it was found that the belt was worn or frayed near the point of anchorage. Planes that leak (some light planes do) and are not hangared, no doubt will get their seat cushions wet and will sit for days drying out. This moisture, held on the safety belt at the edge of the cushion, will cause molding and rotting. After a season of spring or fall rains, it would be proper to remove the word "safety" and just call it a belt.

C. R. WILLIAMSON

Bloomington, Ind.

### I Learned About Flying From That!

(Continued from page 40)

another 50 feet. This put us safely above the tree-top level and with the very gradual climb we were getting, I figured the immediate danger of stalling-in was passed if the engine would continue at full power. It was my first chance to think.

I realized I had pulled a series of boners but definitely was not yet out of hot water. I didn't dare return to the field for fear of the reprimand I'd receive. Hills 2,000 feet high stood between me and home and I was flying in an area where the enemy was still making dusk fighter sweeps. I had no identification, no radio and no lights.

My possibilities were to dump the loot and chutes out of the plane to lighten it, and fly along the Arno valley to the airfield at Pisa, or take a chance on the cur-

rents along the northwest side of the hills. The hills were now getting the afternoon sun. I decided to try that route for home. I didn't have the heart to ask my pick-up to dump all his mementos since they represented to him the adventure of a lifetime. He didn't seem to realize he was sitting in another adventure right now. He thought I had been buzzing the countryside for his benefit.

At least ten minutes had elapsed since I took off and I still had the engine at full rpm. It seemed to be working smoothly enough but my concern mounted, for I knew it was a reworked engine that received attention only when its owner had free time. How much free time he had had recently I didn't know, but I sure hoped it was plenty because I could see no chance of cutting back on the throttle for at least an hour. I made a gradual bank south, determined to try the hills before I called it quits. I had

managed by then to climb the *Cub* to 300 feet.

At just about the most optimistic moment since we had become airborne, we started across the Arno River. Over the water, the downdraft caught us and the bottom nearly fell out of my heart. We dropped about 100 feet. I held course, but the sweat started again as we approached the south shore, and I saw that we were going to clear the trees with very little to spare. My passenger showed concern for the first time when the downdraft caught us and he realized I had no additional power with which to check the descent.

The trees lining the south shore passed about 30 feet beneath us but we quickly reached farming country again. I yelled back to my passenger to explain our predicament and ask if he was willing to try the trip through the hills. He shouted that he couldn't get into any more trou-

ble than he had been in, so was willing to try. I headed for the whitest sunny slope I could see and took care to angle over as many plowed fields as I could spot.

The ground now rose toward us much faster than we were climbing. We held a steady course into the foothills and took the widest valley going in our direction. After a half hour of working steadily south, I estimated we were about 800 feet above the floor of the valley. The crests of the hills were still above us but I couldn't see the need of climbing any higher since the terrain consisted mostly of foothills that ran to crests of about 2,000 feet. I also knew that, as we flew farther southwest, the hills move to the center of the Italian peninsula and we would be coming into wider valleys and finally break out onto plains.

As I mulled these thoughts, I noticed the floor of the valley seemed to be slowly rising to meet us. At the same time the crests of the hills paralleling our course seemed to be coming together. My observation changed to concern when, after a few more minutes, I could see ahead to a point where the crests seemed to gradually join. I added the little bit of power I had eased off and attempted to climb. As we approached the sharply rising land, serious doubts grew that we could clear the ground level at the crest junction. I decided to orbit to gain more altitude before we attempted to squeeze between the hill crests. We gained about 35 feet on the turn. As I completed the 360, I headed for the spot.

A dirt road, fairly well cleared on each side, ran over the point parallel to the course we were flying. I considered the road to be the best point to try the crossing. If I misjudged we could kick over and cut down along the slope. If we could not turn back due to lack of ground clearance, I figured to bounce my wheels on the road and get over the ridge in that manner.

The ground around us seemed to be closing in as we approached. On both sides the slopes rose above us and ahead we could only see sky over the crest we were approaching. Without a horizon ahead, we could not tell if we were above the level of the crest or were looking at it slightly from below. The road fell in below our flight path and for an instant we seemed to be flying parallel to the road level. Suddenly the land ahead fell away. We could see the horizon and the valley behind. We made it with 20 feet to spare.

The remainder of the trip was down hill to home. Letting down to land was the first time since take-off that I had speed enough to ease back on the power. I was so tickled with this extra speed that I relaxed on the landing approach and floated half-way down the runway. Taxiing back to the parking revetment was a long dusty trip but this time I was a lot more patient about it.

I had disrespect for the Cub when I climbed in that afternoon so a couple hours of flying had caught me in almost every mistake I could make in one flight. The airplane to fly is the one you are in, not the one you had been flying. **END**

FLYING—February 1956

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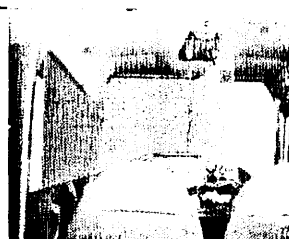


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