

By Keith Welsh – EAA Chapter 83 President in 2022 – Appeared in the December 2022 Newsletter

Tom Flock Tom was a super gentleman and an honored member of our Chapter for many years. Tom is best known for his award winning Waco UPF-7 restorations for which he has become quite famous as you will learn.



*Tom's Induction into the Vintage Hall of Fame 1999*

Tom was married to wife Barbara, they had three daughters and lived in Rockville, IN. In 1960 he purchased the John Deere dealership, Flock Implement, Inc., in Rockville. Barbara passed away in Nov 1999, he then married Carolyn who survived him. Tom began restoring airplanes in 1981 and fulltime upon retirement from the farm equipment business in 1997. The aircraft restoration was in an old shop there at the dealership

where he hosted several Chapter 83 meetings. I specifically remember a gooseneck flatbed implement trailer load of junk setting in the shop ... oops ... those were UPF-7's he had purchased from California awaiting restoration. Shame on me for not noticing. 😞 His meetings were always well attended as there was always much to see.

Tom was born 25 August 1931 EAA 119068. He passed away on 20 November 2006.

**This is his story as told by him:**

**"I soloed in an Aeronca Champ on 5 October 1947 at Port "O" Wood airport in Bloomington, IN. My instructor was Mr. Donald Stipp, now deceased. Mr. Stipp was the botherin-law of the man who employed me and also owned the airport. I was allowed the privilege of flying when I wanted with the airplane and fuel free of charge, compliments of my employer. Top that today, if you can.**

**When I was 17 years old, I took my private pilot check ride at Paris, IL by Mr. Cliff Sword who operated the airport 5 miles north of Paris on the West side of the highway, a grass landing strip. I commuted to Purdue University in a PA-12 Supercruiser during the school term of 49-50.**

**I entered the US Air force in the spring of 1951 and accumulated about 500 hours as a Remote-Control Gunnery Instructor on the B26, B29 and B36 bombers while stationed at Lowery Air Force Base in Denver, CO during the Korean War. Since 1946 I have accumulated about 6000 hours in several different types of airplanes, as listed here; Aeronca Champ, Piper J5, Piper PA-12 Supercruiser, Ercoup, Navion "A", Navion Rangemaster (I still own this one), WACO UPF-7 and a Cessna 172. I have had the controls of a B-29, B-25 and had the privilege of landing a Piper Navajo Twin Commuter with ten passengers, while on vacation in Australia. I have ridden in a P-51 Mustang, Glassair TD, RV-4, Waco Cabin YKS-7, Cessna 210 & 414, a DC6, 707, 737, 747, MD80, DC9, L1011, and a DC10.**

**I have made two emergency landings since 1946. One with a Navion "A" (sliding canopy) when I lost one cylinder at 6000' above the Bloomington IL airport on a trip to Peoria IL and the other in a Waco UPF-7 at Shelbyville, IN during a AAA Fly-in in 1984, (PIC did not properly position the fuel valve). The fuel valve partially closed causing fuel starvation at full power on takeoff. Both landings were successfully completed without further incident."**

Tom's love for flying began at an early age as he flew his first airplane at 13 and received his private pilot's license at age 17. Fueled by his love for airplanes, Tom began rebuilding vintage aircraft as a hobby in 1981. From 1981

Tom had restored 7 Waco UPF-7 biplanes and one Piper J-3 Cub to "grand champion" condition. Wherever Tom's aircraft went, they won Grand Champion awards. One year at Oshkosh, three of his aircraft all won awards and were subsequently featured in the EAA calendar the following year. His newest restoration, the Observation model, won grand champion at the Biplane Expo at Bartlesville, OK in 2005.

His expertise on the restoration and rebuilding of these aircraft made him well-known throughout the experimental community worldwide. At the 1993 American Waco Fly-in, Tom was presented the Bob Poor Memorial Award for exquisite workmanship in the restoration of these biplanes. In November 1999, Tom was inducted into the Vintage Aircraft Association Hall of Fame in Oshkosh, Wis. as one of only 12 inductees to that date.

I might mention that Tom's engine man was none other than John Blouch. I remember Tom saying that radial engines are difficult to build without leaking somewhere. They just leak, that's the nature of a radial engine, however John's engines didn't leak ... ever. That's how good John Blouch was with engines and one reason why he was in such demand.

In 1995 Tom met Burt Rutan and flew Burt in his Waco from Sky King airport in Terre Haute, to Butler Field in Rockville as the highlight of Burt's speaking visit to ISU. I remember Burt's apprehension at flying into a wooded area to land. Not being from the Midwest but from the desert of Mojave, CA Burt was ... impressed!!

One UPF-7 in particular was purchased by his childhood acquaintance Tom McMurtry who some of you may remember flew the 747 with the Space Shuttle attached. Mr. McMurtry was a famous test pilot and NASA pilot for many years. At the culmination of the sale, the two Tom's and their wives flew in two Waco's from Rockville to California where Tom got the grand tour of Edwards AFB and even got some seat time in the SR-71 simulator. One time when Tom McMurtry was in town Tom invited several of us to the Elks north of Terre Haute to meet him and hear his story. I was lucky enough be among those asked to attend. A great story about him and his early years knowing Tom Flock can be found at the link below.

[https://www.aopa.org/news-and-media/all-news/1995/december/pilot/pilots-\(11\)](https://www.aopa.org/news-and-media/all-news/1995/december/pilot/pilots-(11))



*Tom McMurtry with the 747*

Tom was a long-time member of the EAA and local EAA Chapter 83, as well as the Indiana Antique Airplane Association. Many Chapter 83 meetings were held at the Rockville "Waco Factory" hosted by Tom, Barbara, Carolyn, and his friends. As a tribute to Tom, Chapter 83 pilots joined with some of Tom's other pilot friends from Rockville, Clinton, Kingman, and Crawfordsville to form a 10 aircraft flyover at his funeral. The highlight was the missing man formation flown by Keith Welsh - lead, John Gerth - #2, and Bill Foraker - #3 with John doing the missing man in Tom's #2 WACO, "The Red One." It was fitting that Tom's tribute was flown in one of "his" Waco's.

Tom's work had been featured in a couple issues of "The Vintage Airplane" magazine.

Other articles can be found on our Chapter 83 website at the "Historical Documents" link and the three photos shown are a few of his award-winning restored Waco's.

A little history of the WACO Airplane company and in particular the UPF-7. For the curious who may not know where WACO comes from, George E. "Buck" Weaver, test pilot and co-owner and namesake of the Weaver Aircraft Company (WACO).

With war clouds looming in Europe, Waco began design on a military trainer. The first Waco UPF-7 rolled off the line in 1939, (the same year as The Wizard of OZ and Gone With the Wind), and was put to the test as a primary trainer by the U S Air Corps at the

contract, the Air Corps did in fact purchase 14 Waco PT-14's (UPF-7), followed by nearly 600 more to Wright Field in Dayton, Ohio in competition with other manufacturers. Although unsuccessful in winning be used by civilian contractors instructing in the CPTP (Civilian Pilot Training Program) from 1940-42.





Tom was the kind of fellow who made more than one impression on people. He was gracious, polite, particular, very humble, and a darn good pilot. Perhaps the greatest gift a person can leave is the ability to inspire others. The special memories for those of us who knew Tom will live on as inspiration toward the perfection he continually sought.

Through Tom Flock we were able to become acquainted with a few of those great airplanes.

Thank you, Tom, for the memories.



