

ON FIRST FLIGHTS AND FAM HOPS

NAS Livermore, California. Livermore is in the first agricultural valley east of Oakland. Another range of hills separates Livermore Valley from the great San Joaquin Valley.

We had finished all the chores that accompany fleeting up to Aviation Cadets from V-5 apprentice seamen, gassed the big blue fighters for a week, attended the required ground schools, and, on June 26, 1946, were ready to get our first familiarization flight in the Stearman N2S-2.

We got to the hangar, checked the schedule board, drew parachutes, and went out to the flight line to man our aircraft. Most instructors were at their scheduled aircraft to greet the students. Mine wasn't in sight.

I pre-flighted the machine (N2S-3 BuNo 07931), finished strapping on the chute, climbed into the aft cockpit, cinched the safety belt and shoulder straps, and waited. And waited. No instructor. All other planes on this hop had by now departed the flight line and were taking off from the mat. Not me.

About 15 minutes later the instructor arrived – a short, wiry, red-headed guy [LT B. N. Battino]. He climbed in, plugged in the gosport tube, made a few casual comments, taxied out, and we were off to check out the area and the aircraft.

We climbed to altitude (about 3,000 feet) and drove around the area doing things people do on their fam hops. The instructor noticed smoke from a burning grain field and headed for it. He circled, watching a half-dozen people trying to beat down the flames with gunny sacks and shirts.

Enough of this! We hep those guys! The instructor brought the Yellowbird about, slipped to a landing in an unburned portion of the field, taxied to the flame line, did a 180, set the brakes, and added throttle to blow the fire out.

This maneuver touched off a raging inferno in the grain field. Unmiffed, the instructor told me to hold the brakes while he got out to help the farmers beat back the flames.

So here is this 18-year old student on his first hop, sitting in a machine made of burlap and bailing wire, holding the brakes with the engine ticking over, watching a not-too-successful attempt by several people to beat out a well-involved grain fire. About 50 feet aft and closing.

After a bit, the instructor got his marbles together, walked back, and climbed into the machine, waved good-luck to the farmers, took off (obviously down wind) and, since the period was over, flew back to Livermore.

So much for Fam Hops.

AvCad Lou Ives solo tie



NAS Livermore, California
N2S-3 (BuNo 07931)

7 hours dual
15 minutes solo

3 July 1946