

ANTIQUE HUNTING CAN BE FUN

by

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These notes are forwarded with the hope that it may spur others to look in their own back yards for the "gold in them thar hills", as George Hardie, Jr. quoted in a recent issue of AAHS Journal. (4th Quarter, 1957, P. 224)

It is indeed true that there is a thrill in "rediscovering" aviation history. Doc Hood and myself know, because as the result of several newly found friends in the last year, we have located and acquired a JN4D fuselage, complete with two "D" stabilizers, one Canuck stab, rudder, elevators, ailerons, two fins, three center sections and all related hardware. This includes wing fittings, interplane struts, all the wing wires and a brand new radiator in the original crate. This radiator was made by "Mayo Radiator Co.". Incidentally, so far, we have found no OX-5er who has ever seen or heard of this make - any of you know of this manufacturer?

Pictures enclosed describe far more graphically the "find" we encountered. These rarities had been stored in a vineyard in Madera since 1935 - over 22 years. It is hard to believe that with the general acceptance here in Southern California that the central valley had been completely "cleaned out"; this Jenny package was still only 7 miles out of Fresno and less than two miles off the main highway. Its owner, Mr. Robert Ficklin of Illinois, acquired the Jenny, a Heath Parasol, and a set of modified Tommy Morse lower wings in the 1930's, with intent to rebuild the Jenny and Heath. Mr. Ficklin's residence in Illinois and attendant business responsibilities had never allowed him to complete this project.

Truly, to again quote Mr. Hardie, "gold is where you find it". To illustrate how these things happen: Doc and I purchased an incomplete package of JN4D hardware only from Jack Canary over a year ago, in September, 1957, with intent to restore the hardware and build a Jenny. All the fittings looked like a load of rusty junk, but with the assistance of two local processing companies all the material was de-rusted and cad plated. The OX-5 engine in the package had been partially reworked by Jack and is now really a thing of beauty.

We were well on the way, with all fittings restored, etc., and had prepared the fuselage jig and were set to begin fuselage assembly, when our direction was abruptly changed. Both Doc and I work at Northrop Aircraft. Through our own associates, and their knowing of our Jenny interest, we were given the name of a local ex-barnstorm-er, "Mac" Macreery, from whom we secured a beautiful magneto with the adapter pad for our OX. In our several conversations, he told us we should go out to Corona and visit a Mr. Kurt Schober, who had operated an airport in El Monte, California, from 1926 thru 1936. We are indebted to both Mr. Macreery and Mr. Schober for their helpful assistance, because it was this chain of circumstances and Kurt's discover- ing our obsession to restore a Jenny that led him to dig into his memory and recall a friend of his having seen a "beaten-up" Jenny some place close to Fresno back in 1950. Kurt looked up the chap, a Mr. Moran in Alhambra, California, who had seen

the plane and got the name of the owner and forwarded it to us.

We made two 500-mile weekend trips up into the Fresno, Madera, Modesto area before locating the airplane, and a third to take an inventory. Mr. Ficklin, the owner, was reticent to sell the ship because of his sentimental attachment, but we finally convinced him that we should be allowed to purchase it for restoration purposes. So, about two weeks later, Doc, Ernie Freeman, Rob Lambert, Herb Kelley, and I left for Madera with a trailer to claim our prize.

The fuselage was in a 22 foot shed in the middle of the vineyard. A two foot portion of the fuselage was exposed to the elements but partially covered with old tarpaper and wrapped with wire. When Doc ripped back the fabric to inspect the wood, a large rat ran out of the opening. Also numerous mud-daubers' nests were inside the fuselage, including a "live" one in the rear, under the tarpaper.

After taking some pictures, we began dragging the parts outside. We had to remove the wheels and axle in order to get the fuselage on the trailer. When it was finally loaded, we drove over to the owner's home to pick up the radiator which was stored in the garage. We had loaded it on the trailer and were ready to leave when we decided to take "one last look" inside. There, behind some old papers, Doc found a brand new center-section strut. We left shortly, and headed south for another town to check up on one of Ernie Freeman's leads, a Mr. Gallaher, who reportedly had some Jenny parts.

Upon arriving there, we visited his mother, who told us there were "some old airplane parts in the back yard". This is what we found: A Jenny rudder used to support a young tree, a pair of Jenny ailerons that were covering up a hole in the roof, and several interplane struts, complete with fittings, lying on the rubbish pile. His mother told us that "the neighborhood kids have been carrying off that stuff for years". We immediately rounded up two kids and told them we would give them a quarter for every load of parts they could find. In about five minutes they were back with several struts and other parts. We gave them the quarter and told them to keep looking. But those kids got smart real quick; the next five trips they only brought one strut each time for the quarter. We got a big laugh out of it.

After finding a place for these parts on our already bulging trailer, we drove over to the airport to see Mr. Gallaher. There, Ernie picked up a rudder bar, seat, an OX-5 engine, and an extra carburetor and water pump for his own Jenny which he has been collecting for for several months.

Our "Jenny" is typical of all the postwar Jennies you've read about. It has the control system of a JN4H. It has an unusual but mechanically excellent steel tube engine mount support. One of the three center-sections with it was an original 1915 series Jenny strut. The tail skid support has an 1/8" x 1-1/4" strap iron brace (since removed and scrapped) to the tail post. Believe it or not, the upper right hand longeron is spliced between stations five and six (pilot's cockpit) instead of six and seven as it is supposed to be. This particular splice area has a dip in it like a swayback horse, but we love it!

It was almost with a deep sense of regret that we disassembled the fuselage at the splice points to begin restoration. We started the job of replacing all the wood and hardware necessary and hoped to have the fuselage rebuilt by early fall, 1958. Friends are helping on the refinishing of the smaller pieces, so we expect this will be done by year end. Doc now has constructed a new 21 - 28 foot workshop which will give us ample room for our project.

Doc and I are not in a position to support two airplane projects, so we disposed of our original hardware package (from Ganary) to Mr. Rudy Hazuka of Wilmington. He is the proud new possessor of the hardware with which we started the original project and has since implemented his own search with additional parts. We were assisted by many friends in our pursuance of the JN4 parts. Each one of these has a very active interest in historical aeronautica and is himself looking for certain airplane pieces or information leading to them. If any reader can help them, please notify us, and they will receive the information. Ernie Freeman needs Jenny control pieces (rudder bar castings, etc.) and Tommy-Morse wings and empennage. (Ernie recovered and rebuilt an entire S4C fuselage three years ago.) Rob Lambert is looking for Heath Parasol pieces for restoration. Herb Kelley needs original drawings of pre-1914 aircraft, particularly the Bleriot, for reference. Rudy Hazuka is also looking for Tommy-Morse wings and empennage. Also, insofar as our ship is concerned, we have the necessary drawings and sample parts for building a complete standard JN4D, but it would be our preference to use original wing primary structure if available. We would appreciate information concerning location of intact wings if anyone knows of any???

You will notice that, within the group of men listed, there are three Tommy-Morse fuselages. Those of you interested in this particular ship may be surprised to know that there are 80 Horsepower rotaries available for each. 110 horsepower rotaries are still needed for the variously contemplated Fokker Triplane projects we know of. If you readers know of any, we would appreciate your information. Needless to say, after the wonderful experience of locating the Jenny, we now have been bitten so badly by the bug that we've followed up two more leads - one to purportedly another Jenny, the other to some SE-5 wings. Neither matured, but we did get a Jenny tachometer and located a 5-cylinder Velie, which we hope to acquire, -- and so the search continues.

In closing, Doc and I learned, in the year and a half that we have been following this fascinating hobby, these important points:

1. KEEP SEARCHING - As Pete Bowers said, there is undoubtedly as much yet to be uncovered as has already turned up.
2. DON'T WAIT - Follow up all leads immediately, no matter how weak they sound. One hit is worth all the misses.
3. DON'T THROW ANYTHING AWAY- We are continually amazed at the restoration possible through the use of modern materials and processes. For example, we picked up some Jenny parts from the remains of Arrigo Balboni's junkyard in Ontario, California. These parts had been lying in a vacant field since 1936, and some of them are completely usable by de-rusting and replating.

There is no "corner on the market" for enjoying the same experiences. Why don't you begin looking too?

EDITOR'S NOTE: Al Kiefer's aviation interest dates from 1927 when he started with an Ideal kit of the "Spirit of St. Louis". After nearly 20 years of activity, 17 of them with Northrop Aircraft, his part-time restoring project with Doc Hood is about to fulfill his ambition to fly a Jenny. Doc Hood, also of Northrop, began building models at five, and after learning to fly the Jenny, plans to build a full-scale Fokker D-VII.