

First Person Editor:

Postage is enclosed for the return of this manuscript if you do not use it. However a report would be acceptable if it would be more convenient to destroy this copy. A carbon copy is retained in my files.

Cordially and sincerely, WHO'S GOING ANYPLACE?

Franklin Cochran

By

Franklin Cochran

There have been a lot of clichés. Some, thank goodness, have fallen into disuse through sheer weariness. "If I ain't tellin' you the truth, there ain't a cow in Texas." The veracity of this truthsayer would now be more questionable because of his choice of words than from his background of a-ropin' and a-ridin'. If someone had more money than "Piper has Cubs", he'd have a lot of money, for Mr. Piper has 'em.

A contemporary in Aviation once said, "A J-3 is a good ship if you ain't going no place." This is an understatement when applied to a little craft called a Taylor Cub, vintage of a reasonable number of years before 1936. I must state that this was not a J-3. Whether Mr. Piper, or the Wright Brothers collaborated on this little machine with the built in headwind I couldn't say. I have a grave suspicion that it was perpetrated by a Mr. Taylor. This deduction is supported mainly in the fact that it was called a "Taylor Cub". However, I can certify that the same statement of my contemporary that was made about the J-3 is also applicable to the Taylor Cub, with a vengeance.

I was a 2nd Lieutenant in, what we older fellers, called the Air Corps, stationed at Selfridge Field, Michigan, a "Pursuit" pilot. I was up to here in snow and couldn't stand it any longer. I took a months leave in February and went to Key West. It was 1936.

The road to Key West from Detroit was a delight. After driving only about a thousand miles due South the weather warmed up right away. The usual tourist attractions were offered in South Florida: good weather, the opportunity to share your paltry vacation money with the small town Florida cops, an evening's visit in an incredible rathole on the eighteenth floor of the Dade County Building, called the "pokey" --- and good weather.

Over the old railroad causeway, now a highway to Key West. About 180 miles from Miami. Weather, balmy. A months vacation. Key West was exotic, old world. On a romantic tropical evening one might see Hemmingway boxing a tourist or hear the soft splash of the tame fishes in the pool behind Raoul's. Natives were referred to as "Conchs" and the smell of Cuban tobacco was beginning to disappear. Mr. Truman, so far as I know, had not visited the Key West Naval Base. It was virgin territory.

I saw the Talor Cub one day by accident. It was in the yard of a not-too-ramshackly shack, and was owned by Ramón, a Cuban, who had only recently evacuated La Habana under circumstances that were never really brought right out in the open.

It was insinuated that he was on the wrong side of a Coup D' Etat which, they tell me, is not considered in the best of good taste in Cuba. Being on the losing side, that is!

I do not know how or where Ramón got the cub, or how he landed it in or near his front yard, which was surrounded by everything you can imagine uncondusive to a care-free touchdown. These things did not matter in those days. I brazenly asked Ramón if he would lend me his airplane for the month I was going to be in Key West and he forthrightly agreed to do so. He was a nice fellow. I don't care what he did in Cuba.

Ramón flew his Cub back onto the Pan American Airport, where he had evacuated previously due to lack of a dollar-a-day green fee. In my hospitable way, I was to pay the fee for Ramón's plane. My generosity went even farther. I bought my own gas. Other than flying it twice, I do not recall that Ramon got anything out of my lease on his airplane. He was profuse in his apologies the two times he flew, using my gas. Ramón was indeed a nice guy.

Pan American ran a sporadic seaplane schedule into Key West, to Havana. Perhaps three times a week. I never caught a land plane in sight, although there was a field and hangar. The little Cub had the field and the hangar and the islands all to itself.

Having the run of Key West, I invaded Boca Chica. My host and I flew over and landed on the golf course, which

did not produce the enthusiastic reaction we had anticipated, due to the Cubs having a tailskid, rather than a tail-wheel. Furrowing a fine fairway does not result in a warm welcome. At night we would delight the thrill-seekers at Raoul's by buzzing over, trailing a stacatto sound and, perhaps, a faint trace of the perfume of the snake that had already bitten us, most probably at Raoul's, earlier. They were good sports, those night-clubbers, for their disappointment in not seeing blood was politely disguised, but I could tell that their anticipation never waned.

I wanted to fly the Cub to Miami. My host, a medical doctor, had business there. This was fine with Ramon. In fact, he said, I might have the Cub re-licensed while in Miami, since the license had long since expired! This business about no license was news to me, but did not strike my sensitivities with such a resounding impact as might be expected now-a-days. Besides, Ramon was just a helluvva nice guy!

We had been enroute, Key West to Miami, for quite a while. In fact, we were out of Key West for quite a while. An hour and fifty minutes, to be exact. Why I should choose such a time to be exact, I could not say. We had no particular ETA, but surely -- only 180 miles by car --- should be much less by air. We had been flying low over the exquisite blue and green waters of the Keys, perhaps circling occasionally, to take a longer look at the unusual beauty

of the jewel-like keys. Miami should be looming up ahead soon, now. Any time, now. We were out of Key West two hours and five minutes by my watch. It was an Air Corps hack watch and sometimes kept good time.

Two hours and fifteen minutes out of Key West.

An airport, a large one, grass, took shape ahead of us. That was peculiar, for there were no airports on the keys near Miami. Only thing was, this was an airport, for we landed on it and it was a nice, big, fat auxilliary-type airport.

On landing and walking a few miles to a small settlement, we asked a likely-looking native how far it was to Miami. We were not too surprised when he denied all knowledge of any such place as Miami. There was mystery here. Two hours and twenty-five minutes from chock to chock, no Miami. Where were we, in the Sargasso Sea?

On sudden inspiration I queried the Conch:
"How far is it back to Key West"?

"About thirty-five mile," was the immediate reply.

The fellow spoke with authority. On checking the map we found an auxilliary field listed as Marathon Key, located about thirty-five miles from Key West. We had ground out this distance in the amazing time of almost two and a half hours. With another 20 m.p.h. added to the head wind and we really might have ended up in the Sargasso Sea!

Needless to say we postponed the remainder of the flight to Miami until we both recovered from what my doctor friend diagnosed as a mild case of shock, combined with acute pilot fatigue.

Franklin Cochran - 26 November, 1954. Buxton-on-Cape Hatteras, North Carolina.