

What are you reading?

By Chris Hope, Master CFI

All of us who love airplanes have our own fantasies concerning aircraft and journeys. Some of them are possible, some not. For myself, I will never land or take off on an aircraft carrier. I will never fly a C-130 on skis (or in any other configuration), and will probably never fly a single-engine propeller-driven aircraft across the Atlantic Ocean. But that does not keep me from reading about others who have done so.

Over the years I have read just about everything that Charles Lindbergh wrote, and an awful lot that was written about him. But when I picked up *“Atlantic Fever – Lindbergh, His Competitors, and the Race to Cross the Atlantic”*, by Joe Jackson, I realized that I really did not know much about other pilots with their eyes on the prize.

And it was a magnificent prize, and there was a lot of interest in winning. First, some details about the prize. In 1919, Raymond Orteig, an expatriate French hotelier, put up a prize of \$25,000 for the first person to fly between Paris and New York, within the following five years. Although the rules were well-understood at the time, they have become fuzzy for many of us over the years. First, the prize was not for the first person or crew to cross the Atlantic. That trip had been accomplished in 1919 by a team led by U.S. Navy Lt-Commander Albert Read. It took eleven days and for stops, but they did it.

And it was not for the first non-stop flight across the Atlantic. That was also accomplished in 1919 by Capt John Alcock and Lt. Arthur Brown when they flew from Newfoundland to Ireland.

No, it was specifically for a non-stop trip between Paris and New York, flying in either direction. But the prize was not awarded within the five year period stipulated, and so was re-offered in 1924 with no time limit. And even at that, there were no serious attempts for the next three years.

And it was not to be awarded for the first pilot to make the flight solo. In fact, common wisdom at the time was that the flight could not be accomplished solo, but needed a crew of two to four.

Joe Jackson has woven a magnificent story. Sure, we know how it ends. But the side stories of famous names in aviation are what catch our interest. There is Richard Byrd, the man who first flew across the North Pole. (Or did he?)

There is Giuseppe Bellanca, who put his money and his designs into the ring. (For a touch of history, there are still a lot of fine Bellanca airplanes in the air. Find one and enjoy.)

And other aviator names that were common knowledge after the Great War and through the 1920's but which have faded from our memory:

the Frenchman, Rene Fonck, the Allies' "Ace of Aces" during the recent air war over Europe; the Italian, Cmdr. Francesco de Penedo who had flown all over Europe, South America, and the Orient; the American test pilot Clarence Chamberlin; and a score of others.

And where did the money come from to finance the aircraft, the fuel, the parts the living expenses of the pilots and mechanics? We find people like John Rockefeller with his oil money, Edsel Ford with his cars, and Rodman Wanamaker with his department stores in all of the world's major cities.

And then there is the background of the United States and the world at large. The story is spread across the 1920's, a time when anything was possible (except legal drinking in the U.S.) and the new national press and newsreels created overnight heroes.

Joe Jackson has spun a fascinating story, worthy of your time.

Another fantasy that will never come true for me is a flight in a rag-and-tube aircraft from coast to coast. And not just any aircraft. One that is equipped and outfitted with just the very basic flying necessities. We don't need no silly electrical system. No radios, nav or otherwise. No cel phones, no iPads, to GPS's. Just give me a sectional and a whiskey compass to navigate by, and tach, fuel gauge, oil pressure and temp gauges, and I would be happy. (OK, a credit card in my pocket would be nice as well.) And wouldn't it be fun to do this as a teenager with brother

in an airplane that the two of you built together.

There are a couple of reasons why this fantasy is out of my reach. I don't have a brother and it has been a long time since I saw the age of 15. But this was the adventure of Rinker Buck, and he tells his story in "*Flight of Passage*"

This book has been around for about 15 years, but I just recently came across it. Rinker Buck tells of listening to the stories of his barnstorming father when he was a little kid and his dad traded the flying circus days for mundane office work of New York City. He tells of flying with his dad and his older brother during the 1950's when Class A-B-C-X-Y-Z airspace was an unknown.

The idea was Rinker's brother's, and it came out of an act of teen-age defiance as so many ideas do when kids are that age. But after an initial round of head-butting between teenagers and Dad, Dad agreed that it might be ok for fifteen-year old boy to join his seventeen-year old brother in their rural New Jersey barn for a winter of aircraft rebuilding. And then it might be fun for the two of them to take off for California to visit their uncle. What could go wrong?

Anyone who has built or re-built an aircraft knows what can go wrong. But even with school and chores, the two of them (and their sister) stripped and rebuilt a J-3 Cub, including all of the recovering over one winter.

And then, a Fourth of July weekend, and it is time pull out the sectional, find a river to follow, and light out to the southwest.

This is a charming story of flying through the Mississippi valley, Texas, and the southwest. Of meeting with crop dusters, Texas girls on horseback, and dropping Moon Pies on prairie dogs.

But it also a story of growing up, of coming to terms with the different personality of brother and sister, of coming to the realization that Dad and Mom are more than just Dad and Mom. All of us in adulthood eventually realize the Dad and Mom

were people just like us. They were kids with dreams and adventures, they were young adults with the anxieties of new parents, and they were older adults with the pressures and pains of jobs and dreams unfulfilled.

Rinker Buck writes this memoir after the passage of enough years to allow him to hone his writing skills and see himself with a bit of distance. But the charm and excitement of so many years ago still shine through.

Follow your dreams.

Fly safe.

Chris Hope has taught fledgling and experienced pilots for more than 35 years, mostly in the Kansas City area. Chris holds flight instructor certificates for single engine land and sea airplanes and multi-engine land planes, as well as for instrument training. He holds ground instructor certificates for advanced and instrument training. Chris is an FAA Gold Seal Instructor and a Master Certified Flight Instructor. Chris serves as a member of the FAAS team in the Kansas City area. His website is www.ChrisHopeFAAFlightInstructor.com