

## A Pilot's Perspective, #8

By Fred Benton

### “WORDS TAKE WING”

The south wind is shaking cones out of the ponderosa pines in my backyard, the mountains are obscured by cloud, and “fresh powder” is the word at Mt. Shasta Ski Park. Flying is out of the question. Hangar doors are rattling at our various airports, while inside, Siskiyou county's small fleet of light aircraft sits, waiting for less-fearsome weather.

What do pilots do on days like this? Well, quite a few of us enjoy reading books, magazines and articles about flying. Reading is one of the primary joys of my life, and I've logged hundreds of hours in company with some incredible pilots and admired the work of a great many aviation writers. I'd like to share with you a few brief excerpts from some of my favorite flying books:

### “*WEST WITH THE NIGHT*”

by Beryl Markham

(Beryl, born in England 1906, grew up in East Africa to a life of adventure and romance. In 1936 she became the first aviator to fly the Atlantic solo from east to west, departing from England and crash-landing in Nova Scotia 21 hours later.)

*“Tom (Black) taught me in a De Havilland Gipsy Moth, at first, and her propeller beat the sunrise silence of the Athi Plains to shreds and scraps. I learned what every dreaming child needs to know---that no horizon is so far that you cannot get above it or beyond it.”*

### “*WIND, SAND AND STARS*”

By Antoine de Saint-Exupery

(“Saint Ex” was a true poet of the sky. He was a pioneer in commercial aviation, an inspiring author, and a beloved hero to the French. He never returned from a reconnaissance mission in summer, 1944. He was flying a Lockheed P-38 Lightning. Most researchers believe he crashed in the Mediterranean, shot down by a German fighter.)

*“There is a particular flavor about the tiny cabin in which, still only half awake, you stow away your thermos flasks and odd parts and over-night bag; in the fuel tanks heavy with power; and best of all, forward, in the magical instruments set like jewels in their panel and glimmering like a constellation in the dark of night. The mineral glow of the artificial horizon, these stethoscopes designed to take the heartbeat of the heavens, are things a pilot loves. The cabin of a plane is a world unto itself, and to the pilot it is home.”*

*“BURNING THE DAYS”*

a recollection, by James Salter

(James Salter, West Point grad, Korean war F-86 Sabrejet pilot, screenwriter, novelist, short-story author, world-traveler, is my all-time favorite writer—a prose stylist who, in the words of a respected critic, “—can break your heart with a single sentence.” Before his passing, I wrote him once to say that his description of a chance radio-encounter with fellow Air Force pilot Ed White in the blackness of night over the Midwest as one flew east and one west, was the finest piece of aviation writing I’d ever read. He wrote back, and I will always treasure his reply.)

*“Often at dawn, drifting across to us was a great, swelling sound, the running up of engines. It reached a climax and stayed there, this roar that devoured our lives. Then slowly it would diminish, down unseen runway, fading as the flight became airborne. After a moment it began again: first-light recon, off to the Yalu.*

*How well one remembers that world, the whiff of jet exhaust, oily and dark, in the morning air as you walk to where the planes are parked in the mist.”*

*“FOREVER FLYING”*

*By R.A. “Bob” Hoover*

(He did it all: barnstormer, WWII fighter ace, military and civilian test pilot, incomparable air show performer. Much of Hoover’s life was lived “on the edge” and some of his exploits would surpass belief were they not well-documented. Two examples: shot down and taken prisoner by the Germans, he managed to escape, steal a Focke-Wulf 190 fighter and fly it safely into Allied territory; as a test pilot, he survived 17 equipment-failure crash landings. Twice, it was my pleasure to see Bob Hoover fly his aerobatic routines at the Reno Air Races.)

*“Even though I was just twenty-four, I still remember the thrill of meeting Mr. (Orville) Wright, the man who made the first successful powered flight in a*

*heavier-than-air-machine. That fortunate meeting permits me to say proudly that I have known not only Mr. Wright, but also Charles Lindbergh, the first man to fly across the Atlantic; Chuck Yeager, the first man to fly faster than the speed of sound; Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space; and Neil Armstrong, the first man to set foot on the moon."*

### *"LAST FLIGHT"*

*By Amelia Earhart*

(Since her disappearance over the Pacific in 1937, Amelia's legend has inspired books, plays and movies. She is an icon of American aviation—forever young, graceful, appealing and courageous. The value of her legacy to adventurous and technically-oriented young women worldwide is beyond measure.)

*"Why are you attempting this around-the-world flight?" Such was one of the most pertinent queries, whose answer may as well be recorded here.*

*"Because I want to." That was as near a complete reply as I could devise. Here was a shining adventure, beckoning with new experiences, added knowledge of flying, of peoples—of myself. I felt that with the flight behind me I would be more useful to me and to the program we had planned at Purdue.*

*Then, too, there was my belief that now and then women should do for themselves what men have already done—and occasionally what men have not done—thereby establishing themselves as persons, and perhaps encouraging other women toward greater independence of thought and action."*

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