

A Pilot's Perspective

Pilot Profile: Terry Weathers

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If you're a Siskiyou county pilot, or otherwise connected to aviation hereabouts, you probably know or have heard of Mr. Terry Weathers. In my estimation, the term "venerable" would not be out of place in referring to Terry. He has the experience, the demeanor, the "gravitas," if you will, and even the neatly trimmed white beard befitting a senior airman. Best of all, he has a twinkle in his eye, a joke, a bit of aeronautical trivia or an amusing anecdote always at the ready to be shared. When it comes to the colorful history of aviation in our county, Terry is "the Man." Currently, he and some trusted co-conspirators are hard at work on an exciting history project. More about that later ...

Back to where it all began, in 1933: Terry was born in New York City but grew up in Elkton, a small town in rural Kentucky. Among other boyhood attractions, there happened to be a nearby dirt airstrip. Like a trout to a dry-fly, it drew him in and it was there, on a memorable day, that a local flier gave the 12 year old his first airplane ride – in a fabric-covered two-place Aeronca. Needless to say, just like the trout, he was hooked. It would be a long, interesting road from there to the point where he made his living from flying.

Terry, like so many youngsters with "planes on the brain," including me, aspired to become a military pilot. In 1955, following completion of U.S. Navy NROTC training, he graduated from Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, with a degree in mechanical engineering. He applied for flight training. Then came the dreaded vision test – end of dream. Well, that dream anyway ... The Navy, however, wasn't about to let go of such a bright, motivated young man. From 1955–58 he was on active sea-duty, serving as engineering officer on the destroyer USS Everet F. Larson. In April, 1956, Terry married the lovely Jean Spillner, a nursing student he'd met at IIT.

Returning to civilian life, Terry bounced around a bit and found jobs where he could utilize and further advance his engineering skills. Jean continued her nursing career. He worked on steam-turbine development for Allis-Chalmers in Milwaukee, then moved to California where he worked for several aerospace companies including AeroJet General in Sacramento.

While living in Palos Verdes, he and Jean pursued their shared goal of learning to fly. The day before leaving Palos Verdes for Fort Jones, in 1972, Terry received his commercial pilot license and Jean her private pilot license. They based their Bellanca Cruiseair at Scott Valley Airport.

Terry built up flight hours and obtained advanced ratings – instrument pilot, multi-engine, glider, certified flight instructor (CFI), etc. After getting his CFI, he and Jean started the Scott Valley Flying Club. They used a leased Cessna 150 for primary flight training and Terry taught a bunch of folks to fly in that airplane.

In 1979, an opportunity came up they couldn't resist – the fixed-base operation (FBO) at Montague-Yreka airport was available. A deal was made with Bill Maginnis and that is how they ended up as the Montague FBO. Running a small airport, for Terry, was “living the dream.” Their business was registered as “Terry and Jean Weathers dba Montague Aviation.” The facility was leased from the City of Montague. Jean continued her nursing career in Yreka and enjoyed recreational flying. Jean, incidentally, participated in one of UC Davis' first Family Nurse Practitioner programs, earned her FNP, and practiced in that capacity until retirement in 2015.

Montague-Yreka airport was a much busier place in those years than it is today – learning to fly and owning a plane was far less expensive then. Terry, with able assistance from former naval aviators Doug Donahue and Blair Stewart, bookkeeper Bette Stone and mechanic Tim Landon, handled flight instruction, charters, scenic flights, fire spotting and reconnaissance, light cargo trips – you name it. (Many others helped, including daughter Cheryl who served as all-around troubleshooter.)

He also became an FAA-designee, meaning he was authorized to give pilot-checkrides and pass or fail candidates in accordance with regulations and their demonstrated ability. Terry and Jean's business operation lasted from 1979–1996. Larry Graves then took over the FBO, after which Terry continued to fly fires, instruct and give checkrides, flying out of Scott Valley airport.

Today, Terry's logbooks reflect over 8,400 total flight hours. Due to medical issues, he is no longer an active pilot. That being said, he hasn't relinquished one iota of his lifelong love of flight. He and Jean reside in Quartz Valley. They raised two daughters and have three grandchildren and two great-grand-children. Terry was a longtime member of the Scott Valley Airmen (now disbanded), and is one of two active charter members of Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) Siskiyou Chapter 654. (Betty Akana of Yreka is the other original member.)

His ongoing passion is researching and documenting local aviation history. In 2016, a chance discussion between Terry and county museum director Lisa Gioia

led to the creation of the Aviation History in Siskiyou Display Team. This group of pilots and aviation enthusiasts is hard at work creating a new aviation history display which will be set up near the museum entrance. Generous donations from EAA 654 and Walt and Ruth Coppock have been most helpful, but significantly more will be needed.

Team coordinator Weathers says: We've got a great team working on this project, which we hope to have ready to install this fall, but we are eagerly seeking volunteers, such as those with graphic arts capability or willing to tackle research like going through some 40 years of Siskiyou Pioneers looking for aviation related stories.

Anyone interested in helping or with questions, please contact Terry Weathers at (530) 598-2234 or via email at tmw@sisqtel.net.

Terry, all of us involved in Siskiyou county aviation salute you for your untiring efforts and your dedication.