



## “Flying The Spirit” You Can Too...

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**Masthead:**  
A Piper J-3 Cub  
flying over Wrexham Tower  
at Yale.

This past summer, having been working toward my instrument Rating for many months, I thought I needed a break: a flying adventure. I decided that it would be an experimental aircraft Association (EAA) “Fantasy Flight Camp.” EAA offers three of these weekend adventures each year at its Oshkosh, Wisconsin headquarters. Each consists of a ground school and the chance to fly in one of EAA’s historic aircraft. My choices were a WWII B-17 “Flying Fortress,” a late 1920’s Ford Trimotor transport, or EAA’s replica of Charles Lindberg’s Ryan NYP “Spirit of Saint Louis.”

I opted for the “Spirit.” The B-17 was hard to reject, but there’d be no stick time in the bomber and there’d be only ten or fifteen minutes at the controls of the Ford. In the “Spirit” I’d be able to get about a half hour actually flying the plane.

Chuck Larsen, EAA’s Director of Museum and Resident Education was our host for the weekend. Chuck is a handsome, warm and friendly guy. For that matter, every EAA staffer I met at Oshkosh—directors, cooks, pilots and museum staff—were very friendly and went out of their way to help make our experience great. Chuck met us Friday afternoon for check-in. There were 16 participants and 5 spouses in our group. Most of the pilots seemed to be in their forties or fifties, though we ranged from mid-twenties to well into the eighties. Our twenty-something had only last year gotten his Private ticket and hadn’t flown in a year. This weekend was his reward for he and his fiancée having met their savings goal for their upcoming wedding. Our octogenarian had lost his medical, but his disability hadn’t killed that sparkle in his eye, and the grin on his face as he climbed into the “Spirit” told the real story.

Friday night was a great illustrated talk by Vern Jobst, garbed in authentic reproductions of Lindberg’s flight clothing. Saturday morning and early afternoon was ground school, beginning with the historical background and recounting of Lindberg’s flight across the Atlantic. Later, Sean Elliot, EAA’s Director of Flight Operations, reviewed the Ryan NYP’s systems and flight characteristics. What I remember most from Sean’s class was his discussion of the Ryan’s stability. The plane was, he said, dynamically unstable in pitch and yaw, and—“at best”—neutrally unstable in roll. “This is going to be interesting flying,” I thought.

Flights started Saturday afternoon. The winds were very stiff and at almost 90 degrees crosswind to the grass strip at EAA’s Pioneer Airport, so operations were moved to Whitman Regional Airport on the other side of EAA’s facilities. When my turn came on Sunday afternoon, the winds were still pretty high. As I prepared to climb into the plane, the wind was gusting at 30 knots, though close to the runway heading. Climbing in to the “Lindberg seat” was quite

a charge. George Daubner, my instructor pilot was in the front seat EAA installed in place of the original plane’s fuselage tank. Taxiing out, the local controller in the tower said she thought that we had guts flying in this stuff.

Our call sign was “Spirit 211” and we were soon cleared for take off. As we started our roll, the wind was 14, gusting to 23. A couple of hundred feet off the ground, George turned the plane over to me. There’s no instruments in the back seat and the view outside is pretty much limited—no forward vision to speak of. It’s seat-of-the-pants flying. And Sean was right about the stability...or lack of it. “You’re diving!” George announced urgently over the intercom. He took the controls and got me back to straight and level. It was constant work, trying to get the “Spirit” to do what it wanted, but gradually, I got the and of coordinated flight, trying some ninety degree turns in 30 degree banks. At least that’s what they seemed to be: no attitude indicator or heading indicator in the back seat.

After a bit, I realized that I could see the airspeed indicator around George’s wide back. Between that and “flying the wing” I could get a much better sense of whether I was climbing, diving, or level. George asked if I’d like to try the pitch “departure.” Yup! I pitched up ten or fifteen degrees and neutralized the stick. Whoa! The nose just kept going up! For a moment, I thought “give it back to George!” but abandoned that notion and put in some pitch down and got it back to straight and level.

On our way back to Whitman, George asked me to do a 360. I banked into a 30 degree left turn. It took some juggling of the

controls, different flying a Cherokee, but I managed to do three or four 360’s without losing any altitude and with the ball centered. “You’ve got it!” George exclaimed. I felt pretty good.

George took over the landing. The wind was now 20, gusting to 28. We worked really hard; dancing on the rudder pedals and jiggling the stick. Remember, this plane is dynamically unstable. Taxiing in was an even tougher chore, having not only to do all the tail-dragger S-turns, but having to deal with constantly changing, stiff, gusty winds. George was dragging himself after a few flights that afternoon.

Bottom line? It was a great experience and worth every nickel. The food was great, the rooms at the Air Academy Lodge nice and comfortable, the people nice to be with and the flying...the flying was FANTASTIC!

For information on EAA Fantasy Flight Camps, call 920-426-6829 or log on to [www.airacademy.org](http://www.airacademy.org).

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Experimental Aircraft Association, Oshkosh, WI, NYP #2. (Experimental Aircraft Association)