

THE WEAKER SIX

THE STORY OF THE CHUM SEAT SPECIAL, THE CLEVELAND RACING TEXANS, AND THEIR FEMALE PILOTS

BY JOHN D. BYBEE

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SOCIETY OF AIR RACE HISTORIANS



Betty "Buzz Betty" Clark and a Texan.

Denver, Colorado: It was the third week of February 1946, and the anxiety and strain of WWII was dissolving. Thirty-year-old honorably discharged Army Air Force veteran James "Eddie" Edward Dyer was not keen on returning to his Ozark roots in Camdenton, Missouri, where he worked pre-war as a carpenter at a lumber yard. In Denver, Eddie met Don W. Vest, another WWII veteran. Vest had been a used car salesman and operated an automobile garage before the war. In the intermountain West, Don was known for his honesty and integrity.

On 25 February, Eddie and Don founded the Vest Aircraft and Finance Company, the forerunner of today's Univair Aircraft Corporation. Eddie and Don organized a full-service aircraft sales, instruction, parts and repair company. Don would handle the sales and financing of airplanes, Eddie was in charge of aircraft repair and flight instruction. Vest Aircraft Company was CAA and GI Bill approved for flight training, ground school, and advanced instrument training. The Vest Aircraft Company motto was "All parts for some — some parts for all."

Vest Aircraft and Finance Company initially set up shop on the 330-acre Hayden Field

(former owners Lou Hayden and Henry Combs) northeast of Denver. Hayden Field had been constructed by the AAF as an auxiliary field to the sprawling Lowery Field. During the war, Denver University students and members of the Colorado Women's College learned to fly there in Wacos and Cubs. Military aviators, like Class 43-CO-12, graduated from Hayden Field. The airport had five gravel runways, the longest 4000-feet, and two brick and steel hangars. Upon taking possession, Eddie and Don renamed the airport "Vest Field."

Eddie and Don repaired and modified all makes of civil and military surplus aircraft and sold them worldwide. Their typical ad read, "All makes, late model planes. Plus, BTs/ATs, Stearmans, Fairchilds, Dusters etc. Deluxe plush recovered heavy-wing constant prop-twin Cessnas \$2950." (These were conversions of the Cessna UC-78/T-50 Bamboo Bomber.)

In early



Race 75 as it appeared at Cleveland 1946. The plane, flown by Grace Harris, was stock except for the addition of a three-blade propeller.

1946, the merchants and civic leaders of Cleveland, Ohio, sponsored a National Aviation Day, which previewed and generated publicity for the Labor Day resumption of the Cleveland National Air Races, which had ceased with WWII. Vest Aircraft, determined to have a presence at the Cleveland Races, selected the best two AT-6As from its scores of surplus Texans for conversion to racing planes.

The first Vest AT-6A was formerly US Army Air Corps serial 41-277 (c/n 77-4236) and had been delivered on 29 January 1941 and #277 was initially assigned to Maxwell Army Airfield, Alabama. In September 1941, #277 was at Turner Army Airfield, Albany, Georgia. January 1942 brought #277 to Napier Army Airfield, Dothan, Alabama, where a cadet ground looped it on landing on 18 February 1942. That AT-6A was repaired, only to

of another landing ground loop on 29 April 1942. It was again repaired and returned to the 431st School Squadron. On 27 May 1942, #277 was involved in a midair with AT-6A 41-16324. Both AT-6As survived and were repaired. The Texan flew for the balance of the war from Army fields in Clewiston, Florida; Marianna, Florida; and Lincoln, Nebraska. #277 was disposed of as surplus at Ponca City, Oklahoma, in December 1945 and Vest Aircraft registered the AT-6A as NC64448.

The second Vest AT-6A, was formerly USAAC 41-499 (c/n77-4528) NX62280. Vest modified both Texans with recessed, right mounted turbosuperchargers from either a B-17 or B-24. NX62280 was sold in



For 1946, former WASP pilot Jane Page would race the Chum Seat Special.



The Chum Seat Special in all its glory at Cleveland. The B-17/B-24 turbosupercharger can be seen on the right forward fuselage. Race 54 has had the canopy removed and the pilot's cockpit was protected by a small windscreen. A mechanic could be carried to the races in the rear seat but had only two small split-windows to dispel any form of claustrophobia. As can be seen, the plane was a gleaming silver courtesy of something called "Ming Paint Plating Process" and that fact is noted on NX64448's vertical tail.