



ADVENTURES WITH THE YELLOW PERIL

THE DISCOVERY OF A NAVAL AIRCRAFT FACTORY N3N-3 THAT HAD NEVER BEEN CIVILIANIZED
LEADS TO A MOST INTERESTING RESTORATION AND ALL SORTS OF FUN-FLYING
BY ADDISON PEMBERTON

EDITOR'S NOTE: Before I turn over the stick to my friend Addison Pemberton, I have to relate my own little Naval Aircraft Factory N3N story. Back in the early 1980s, *Air Classics* purchased a highly-modified N3N-3 that had been doctored up for airshow work with a Pratt & Whitney R-985 up front, a custom smoke system, BT-13 wheels and brakes, and a fancy airshow paint scheme that would have been the envy of any Las Vegas pimp. The Warbird Movement was just starting to kick in and pilots were finally beginning to search out aircraft in military schemes. Well, this old beast was anything but and that was probably the reason why it was selling cheap. My pal and I took the N3N-3 up to a central California airshow, arriving on a warm August evening and after a couple high-speed passes (remember, high-speed is a relative term for the N3N), we plopped down on the runway and taxied to parking. Unstrapping and crawling out onto the wing, a number of people greeted us and several said, "Thanks for bringing such a great looking Stearman!" Well, in that type of situation all you can really do is smile and nod your head. There was one older gentleman standing back from rest of the spectators. You could tell age was catching up with him. He was using a cane but his back was ramrod straight. As the crowd began to lose interest and head off to the beer tent, he came over to us and said "I have not seen an N3N since 1942." His eyes were glistening a bit as he ran his hand down the fuselage side and I could tell his thoughts were in a different location and a different time. "Thanks for letting me look at the old girl — it means a lot." I then asked when was the last time he had gone aloft in an N3N. A bit puzzled, he said "Well, 1942 of course and then I was off to Corsairs. Why?" I said that he must remember where his feet went and he gave me an odd look. We needed a bit of help and a ladder but we soon had him strapped in rolling down the runway against the last of the late afternoon sun. Soon as we were airborne, I said "Your plane" and raised my hands to show he was in control — and he was. We were up about 20 minutes and he put the N3N through its paces. He had to get used to the extra power but that was no problem. As I said, he was in control. Keeping my hands gently on the controls, I let him bring the N3N in for a landing. He taxied to parking and shut down. Then, I could not see him. I thought perhaps he had bent down to take a look at the instruments but that is not what he was doing. Leaning forward and holding his head in his hands, he was weeping uncontrollably. "So much time, so many people," he kept repeating and I think I knew what he was trying to express. Over to you, Addison. >>

CREATING A TRAINER

As noted, the Naval Aircraft Factory N3N series of primary trainers is often mistaken for the much more numerous Boeing Stearman Model 75 Kaydet. However, the two aircraft are vastly different. The N3N was created to replace the Consolidated NY-1 and NY-2 Navy trainers, which in turn had replaced the earlier Curtiss Jenny wood and fabric biplanes. The Navy's system of training new aviators was rapidly advancing and the Bureau of Aeronautics wanted a cost-effective, rugged aircraft with a long life-span. Also, the new design had to be capable of land and float operations and this would be a cost-effective feature that would allow young naval cadets to train for both types of operation. Design work on the N3N would begin in the early 1930s — smack in the middle of the Great Depression that was devastating the country — but the

Jay Pemberton and the N3N-3 on floats charges down the Spokane River. (Ellin Pemberton)