

# Catahoula Remembered with JEB and Leroy

## Ouachita Journey

By John Ed Bartmess

Last week I wrote about the Hunter Dunbar Expedition reenactment by the Historical Reenactors Association on the Ouachita River. After reading it, I started remembering Shirley's and my trip from the end of the Ouachita River in Jonesville to the beginning of the Ouachita near Mena, Arkansas.

But first, I would like to tell how the Ouachita got its name. Since the Ouachita runs through what was once Choctaw Indian territory, it has a Choctaw Indian name. Ouachita in Choctaw means "Big Hunting Ground," but it also means "silver water" or "big hunt." The word "Ouachita" is composed of the two words, "ouac" for buffalo and "chita" for large. Put together they mean "Country of Large Buffaloes." This information was on the internet by a person named Harlan.

### Now our "Ouachita Journey."

A couple of years after the Hunter-Dunbar Expedition reenactment, I asked Shirley if she would like to take a

drive from the end of the Ouachita River in Jonesville to its beginning, near Mena, Arkansas. She said, "Yes, but I am not dressing like a buffalo hunter and I am not sleeping on the bank of any river."

We were in Wildsville at that time so we crossed the Old Black River Bridge in Jonesville, just to be able to say we had crossed the first bridge located over the Black River. From that bridge we could see where Little River, the Tensas River and the Ouachita River flowed together to form the Black River.

When we got to Harrisonburg, we crossed over the old bridge so that we could say that we had crossed the last bridge on the Ouachita River. After passing through Enterprise, we crossed the Ouachita on the Duty Ferry, which is now the last operating ferry on the Ouachita River. When we got to Columbia, we crossed over on the Long-Allen bridge which has been replaced by a new bridge named the "Governor John McKeithen Bridge." As we left Sterlington where

we had crossed the Ouachita River and then turned around to get back on U.S. Highway 165 and saw where Bayou Bartholomew, the longest bayou in the United States, runs into the Ouachita River. The Ouachita got alot bigger there.

When we got to Strong, Arkansas and went on into El Dorado and then followed Highway 7 through Camden, Arkansas, where the Ouachita really becomes one of the clearest and most beautiful rivers I have ever seen. At Crossett, Arkansas, we turned west on Highway 82 and crossed the Felsenthal National Wildlife Reserve. It was in the game reserve where Saline Bayou empties into and makes the Ouachita River much larger. We crossed the Ouachita River again about halfway between Camden and Arkadelphia, where we passed the Ouachita Baptist Church. Now I think I know why our Baptist Church in Enterprise is called New Ouachita Baptist Church.

As I said, this was the most beautiful portion of our journey. The water was

shallow and very clean on this section of the trip. We saw a sign that said "Tate's Bluff." Since we have a great grandson named Tate, I had to take Shirley to see it. Near Arkadelphia, the Ouachita is dammed to form DeGray Lake. After that, the river is dammed again to form a much bigger lake named Lake Ouachita. Next, we went through a community named "Washita." Our journey carried us through Hot Springs to Mena, Arkansas.

The Ouachita River begins in the Ouachita Mountains in southeast Oklahoma, which is near Mena, Arkansas. The Ouachita begins as a spring coming out of Rich Mountain. It flows under the highway and then south where an unnamed creek runs into it. The river then flows about twenty miles near Mena, Arkansas. From there it flows into the town of Washita, Arkansas. From there it is about six hundred more miles back to Jonesville, Louisiana, where four rivers meet, and where we had begun our "Ouachita Journey."

## My Flying Experiences

by Leroy McMillin

### (Part 1 of 2)

Someone once told me "The hardest part about flying is walking away from the crash." I suspect that saying dates back to the early days of flight when a lot of crashes occurred. Even so, just the thought of flying free in the sky was and still is exciting, and it gets a lot of young people thinking of making flying a career choice. And sometimes just for fun.

Even as a kid I was interested in flying. Not just toy airplanes, but real airplanes. All of them: small airplanes, and giant cargo planes, but also helicopters, airships, sailplanes, hot-air balloons, rockets, and whatever else a human can build that lets me travel through the air. Of course, it was all pipe-dreaming. At least at first. But 80 years later I can look back and say I managed to get in a lot of time in the air in an assortment of aircraft. Only now with all the rules and precautions and uncomfortable seating and expense has flying become a real struggle for me, at least on commercial flights. Perhaps a private jet to scoot me off to places where only the rich can play would be fun. That's probably not going to happen in this life. But I can look back and recall just about every flight I ever made.

My first actual flight was in a two-seater plane owned by a man from Sicily Island, Louisiana, ten miles up the road from Harrisonburg. He bought it because, "he wanted one." To this day I use that same excuse when I purchase something I clearly don't need. I think we all do that sometimes.

I can't recall his name now but he worked in Harrisonburg and occasionally shopped in my Dad's grocery store. One day he offered to take me for a ride in it to which I readily accepted. But no date or time was set and it was just left at that.

A few days later I was still in my wet swim suit returning home from Hawthorn's Creek where the water was so cold we could break out the goose-bumps just looking at it. We just jumped in shivered a minute or two. A lot of folks back then had lots of fun times in that old swimming hole. The last I heard it no longer existed. But how can something so wonderful just disappear? Sad...

Anyway, I looked up and saw an airplane buzzing over the bridge. I didn't know who it was but they got my atten-

tion. I drove across the bridge and pulled off to the side of the road. I eagerly watched him circle around and land in Mr. Johnny Stutson's pasture by the highway. He taxied up by the fence and shut the engine off. I recognized him right away and it didn't take me but about two seconds to get out of the car and over to the fence.

He asked me if I still wanted to go for that ride he promised. Heck yeah! And just like that I was in the seat of an airplane watching and listening to everything he was saying and doing. And all of a sudden the plane sort of lurched forward as the prop caught the air and started pulling us along.

He pushed the throttle and we went faster and faster across the grass. I could feel the rear of the plane lift off the ground. It was already flying. And a few seconds later he pulled back on the yoke just a little and I could feel the wheels bouncing slightly as they rolled across the tufts of grass. And then we were flying.

Right there at that very second I was flying for the first time in my life. What a thrill... I somehow felt different from when I was on the ground. In spite of being inside and buckled in, I felt "free" and that's when I understood what birds must feel when they fly effortless through the air, sometimes without even flapping their wings. What a thrill...

I fully understood the 'science' of flying, but nothing in the science books could describe the magic of the moment. I was flying.....

He kept climbing and seconds later I could look down and see the cattle getting smaller and smaller. We were now higher than Fort Hill off to my right, and still climbing. Now we were crossing the Ouachita River headed southwest. There was flooding and I had never given any thought as to what a flood looks like from the air. It's beautiful in a strange sort of way. But it also told me that places where I used to play were deep under water and would be until the flood went down.

My jaw was already aching from the grin I had on my face. I wished I had a camera. I tried to remember every detail so I could tell my Mom and Dad. Oh #%#@#, I didn't get Daddy's permission to fly! But a belt-whipping was a small price to pay for the thrill I was having.

He banked and turned back to the pasture, now Harrisonburg Municipal Airport. We made an easy touchdown and taxied up to the fence again. I got out, thanked him for the hundredth time, and watched as he lifted off the ground headed home.

I didn't know it, but Daddy had already given him permission to take me for the ride, so there was nothing to ruin the magic of that day.

The next time I flew was from Shreveport to Dallas on a Delta DC-3. Henry Arthur Taliaferro and I were being processed into the Army. We scored very high on their tests and they wanted to talk to us about a special assignment what turned out to be a really great opportunity for both of us. Seeing Dallas from the air was mind-boggling to us. And Love Field was a mad-house of people and planes going all over the world. That was February 28th, 1960.

The next was time I flew was just me and 25 other soldiers on a Piedmont Airlines flight from Boston to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Henry Arthur had been assigned to a base in Washington, DC. I was already getting used to the small seats for my six-foot, three-inch frame, now beefed up from my Army basic training. It too was an uneventful flight, except for me. I loved every minute of it, especially seeing the Smoky Mountains below. I would become to love those mountains, often wishing I could live there.

And for the next few months we were assigned to the 18th Airborne Corps that heads up the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, and the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, that we were there to support.

There were multiple flights in military aircraft (a C-123 and a C-130) until I was discharged in 1963. There's no 'creature comforts' in those. They are work-horses. Still are. I felt honored to fly in them. And I have a lot of respect for their history in peace and war.

And suddenly, I was back to being a civilian at home with not much to do during my time off from working the convenience store Daddy built in Harrisonburg. It was called "PicM."

So I hooked up with Bob McHale, who was working for a crop-dusting business in Jonesville. I visited there a lot. And one

day, Red Hamilton, the crop-dust pilot asked me if I wanted to take a quick ride up to Wallace Ridge to check out a field he was going to spray for the first time. Heck yeah!

Back then, crop dusters were either Stearman Biplanes, often WWII surplus, that had (two wings and open cockpits, or a simple Piper Super-Cub (2 seats, small, slow, and very reliable). Red's plane was a Piper Super-Cub that had been fitted with a chemical tank and spray booms. He didn't load any chemical for this flight.

The flight from Jonesville up Wallace Ridge was quick, easy, and uneventful. Then we reached the field that ran along side of the highway. There were a few scattered trees in the field, more trees and power-lines on two sides and the turn-rows went right up to the fence and trees. I'm thinking how is he going to get chemical on all that, especially up to the turn-rows.

The next thing I know he did a sharp nose-dive at one end of the field, leveled out at about seven or eight feet off the ground (3' over the cotton stalks), and was headed straight for a tree. A quick hard left and a hard right got him around the tree. Another couple hundred feet he pulled straight up over the turn row. He quickly rolled to the right and back down squarely over the turn row and immediately leveled out at seven feet and headed back square-on toward that same tree in the middle of field.

Once again, a quick hard left and hard right and he was back on track to the other end of the field where the power lines were. At the last second, square over the turn row, he pulled straight up, once again staying square to the turn row, rolled and settled out about fifteen feet up as he started to climb to enough height to return to Jonesville. He was satisfied he could spray the field and get all of it wet.

As for me, it was a thrill, of course. And I never once thought my life was in danger. If anything, I was glad he trusted me enough not to panic and cause him to crash.

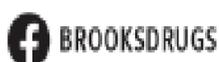
After that experience I have a whole new appreciation and respect for those who do that kind of work, no matter where in the world they are doing it.

(Part 2 next week)

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