

Of New Airplanes and Old Friends *By Richard C. Kardell*

As my FAA mandated date of total and utter incompetence neared, more specifically my sixtieth birthday, I agonized over what I would do in my forced exile from aviation. Golf every day was pretty much out of the question, (too many lakes, and not enough balls), fishing with my skills was a poor option, and hardly compared, adrenalin wise, with landing a Boeing on an icy runway out of a two hundred and a half approach with gusts to forty five, braking action reported nil by a D-8 Caterpillar tractor, and a new co-pilot who still thought a flashlight was a place to store your dead batteries. Because of the fact that I was also their Chief Pilot, they were frequently convinced I must surely be totally incompetent, because I also knew how to fly that damn desk, when I was not in a cockpit.

So as a logical homo sapien, highly trained in the aeronautical complexities of navigating a much heavier than air conglomeration of various aluminum parts and pieces, held together with rivets and safety wire, through the boundless halls of space, and never having touched a rivet gun, bucking bar, dimpler, countersink tool, shear, brake, or deburing tool, or even knowing that these aviation tools existed, or could be purchased from an assorted number of vendors who had been able to create catalogues that would read as cryptically as most of the FARs, it seemed the only logical conclusion that could be gleaned from this varied assortment of facts was --- to build an airplane.

This endeavor would surely show the FAA, not to mention my wife, that I was not totally incompetent. After a brief and informative phone call to Van's, in which I was informed, after a brief description of my experience and background in aviation, 'Hell yes, you can build one, we have even had an attorney build one.' Yep, that pretty well cinched it. I was going to build an airplane.

I ordered a kit and shortly thereafter converted my garage into a hanger. The first box of aluminum arrived, and as I excitedly unpacked it, I decided it might require a bit more reading about the care and feeding of miscellaneous aluminum parts associated with the fabrication and construction of flying machines.

But then again, I knew people. People were a lot better than books. Some of these people worked for me, had A and E tickets and surely would be happy to sacrifice a few hours of their free time to give their Chief Pilot a few pointers on the fine art of aircraft building. There was also the possibility that their thoughtful advice could result in their ascension of a number on the infernal seniority list that governed their lives and life style and create a vacancy in the Chief Pilots office that they would be happy to fill.

After a brief visit by Captain Tom Christ, and a few pointers, I actually got the hang of airship building, and decided I could really pull this off with the addition of another grand or so in tools.

At this time in my career, I was scheduled to reach my sixtieth birthday in about two years. I thought two years was about right for getting ready to hang it up, and what little spare time I had in the meantime could be devoted to building my dream airplane, an RV 8. Well, almost my dream airplane. I had previously checked my bank balance, and with a keen sense of the obvious, correctly concluded that a P-51 was beyond my budget capabilities.

As was observed by the 'Bard,' plans oft times do go astray and a phone call from my boss offered a position at the home office that would not require my resignation and retirement at age sixty. It appeared 'Murphy' had reshuffled the deck and I had drawn an ace.

My new position meant I would not have the time to work on the airplane. It also extended my time frame for the requirement of an air machine. I sold my completed empennage and Quick Build delivery date to another pilot and

moved to HQ.

I put aside all thoughts of building an RV. About two years later, as my useful life to the company neared an end, the virus struck again after a brief but infectious visit to Oshkosh. The order was placed!

Some months later, timed to coincide with my actual retirement date, the Quick Build kit arrived. With the help of about seven people, the humongous crates were unloaded and unpacked with the abandon that totally doomed any hope of a realistic inventory system, that would be solemnly longed for in the future, as I spent hours searching for a missing 'Part Number F832-something or other.'

The bittersweet day of my retirement had come and gone. I was now working everyday on what was rapidly becoming an airplane. I had gone to the local airport to get acquainted with general aviation again, to find some old long time friends who were also about to retire and were also planning to build an RV. The renewed acquaintances were the friends of my youth and days as a young Co-pilot or very young Captain. It was once again apparent to me; it takes a long time to become an 'old friend.' These friendships were reinforced daily as we relived old shared experiences from the DC-3 days and our progression to the modern jet age. The sharing of these reminiscences and shared new devotion to our RVs brought us together as if time had ceased.

Since this now was my second project, I started with far more experience than my first effort. The building pace quickened as my abilities and experience broadened and the number of 'do overs' was reduced. There was an empennage in two weeks. The fuselage was coming together with the installation of all those damn nut plates and their accompanying miscellaneous parts. The electrical system wiring was going in. The GPS wiring was complete. The instruments were installed. The gear was fitted. The wings were mated and they were true and fit perfectly. It was time for paint. During all these weeks, people had appeared much as an apparition, outside the garage, curiously peering in, sheepishly at first, wondering if their curiosity would be willingly accepted, 'Ah--- what are you building there, an airplane?'

Yep, they were all welcomed and all offered their help. 'New friends' were made and welcomed. One, now an RV 8 owner and builder, Don Yarbrough, offered countless hours of help. He ordered his kit before mine was finished. (It now flies my wing.)

Another 'old friend,' Butch Carr, spent hours helping me and became a master at riveting. He said, 'I want one of these. Do you think I can build one?' 'If I can do it, you can do it, if you want it bad enough,' I replied. He continued to help as we told stories of the 'old days.' We renewed our friendship on a daily basis. The 'old friend' bonds from twenty years ago became stronger with each rivet, each round of laughter as each well-told story of life in the airline business was retold. He said, 'Okay you have convinced me. I will build one too. Let's paint them the same and we will have a flight of two.' He designed a paint job modeled after a P-51, and we decided it was perfect.

It came to pass. Fourteen months later N110RK flew on April First, 2001. It was not an April Fools day tale and Butch was there to share my joy and feeling of accomplishment.

'Murphy' and I, had spent a lot of time together. Building your first airplane is not a menial task, but it can be done with help, persistence, and love. I have well over 30,000 hours and I readily admit, as I reached a thousand feet of altitude in an airplane I had built, that was performing flawlessly, I experienced an emotion I had never known before. To describe it as exhilarating is an understatement.

Butch found an ad in the RVator for an RV8 that was for sale. A call to Van revealed that the airplane construction had been started by a friend of Van's who had recently passed away from a heart attack on a fishing trip and Van was acting as a friend of the family and offering the airplane at auction. A quick inspection trip to Oregon by Butch

and me, revealed a beautifully built, to that point, airplane with a customized engine that anyone would desire. A bid was submitted that turned out to be the winning bid.

Butch began his trip to Van's to retrieve his RV 8. With gracious help of Van and his employees, the aircraft was loaded into a U-Haul truck for its four-day trip to Texas. Yep --- all the old friends appeared again to help unload the new 'kid on the block' that was to become N810BC.

Once again time passed with the installation of a different panel. Bravo Charlie had to be IFR. That meant a new panel. Wings had to be finished. Interior had to be installed. Instruments, fuel system, wiring, on and on.

Butch had retired and did some instructing and some brokerage. His days were not entirely devoted to building Bravo Charlie. A year passed as I flew and Butch built. Bravo Charlie was ninety percent done with only ninety percent to go.

Since I had finished my airplane, I had helped Butch with his Bravo Charlie whenever he wanted or needed my help. He was quite insistent however, that he was going to do whatever he could by himself. He wanted it perfect, and didn't want any hatchet jobs on his airplane just for the sake of saving time.

The fleet of RV's was growing at our airport (CXO). The EAA Chapter was active and populated by good fellows and 'new friends' of various backgrounds. We now had about seven RV's either based there or under construction. Butch worked, I flew.

The retired Air Force guys were showing up. 'Deuce' Sam Ward, 'Spuds' Jim Pohoski, 'Trash' Joe Walsh, all retired Air Force guys, had done stuff with airplanes that we in the air transport business had not had a chance to do. They were teaching us how to really fly formation, aerobatics, and some air combat. It turned out those Eagles and Stars they picked up along the way in their military careers, really meant something. This flying turned out to be more fun than those ILS approaches and a lot more challenging.

I was becoming a bit of a guru on RV's, by now having assisted with the construction of about 3 and half airplanes. I became an EAA Flight Advisor and was starting to feel like I was really a part of aviation again. Well --- maybe this retirement stuff wouldn't be so bad after all.

My RV now, had been flying for over a year. I was getting impatient with the slow progress that was now being made on Bravo Charlie. I really wanted to see those two identical airplanes in the air with Butch and me 'troding through the footless halls of space on our laughter slivered wings.'

But alas, 'Murphy' returned with a vengeance! Butch had been feeling less and less like working on Bravo Charlie. His lethargic demeanor prompted the thought that maybe a trip to the Doc might be in order. The hammer fell. The big C! It was a big, Big C. Lungs, liver, and too much to mention. Bravo Charlie was still ninety percent done with ninety percent to go.

It takes a long time to be an 'old friend'. But when you are the right kind of guy, 'new friends' are made on the journey through life. At the EAA meeting of September 13th, 2003, I told the members of Chapter 302 of Butch's situation. I said, 'If some of you would like to come down to the hanger for a couple of hours, we could get some work done, and maybe Butch would have a chance to fly Bravo Charlie before it is too late.'

There were too many people to count in the hanger after that meeting. The empennage was mounted. The wheel pants were fitted that day. That week the wings were fitted and installed. The offers to help were incessant and constant. Everyday, someone appeared to work on Bravo Charlie. Without the dedication and commitment of those individuals, Bravo Charlie would still be lying around the hangar like a dismembered corpse. Sam Ward, Dennis

McCright, Dick Stevens, Jed Dogget, Don Yarbrough, to name a few. The many are too numerous to list. They are all mostly RV owners and builders and members of EAA Chapter 302.

Two months later, Bravo Charlie flew for the first time. I had the honor of flying Bravo Charlie on its initial test flight. Sam Ward, 'Deuce', flew chase in my RV, and for the first time, we saw those two matched RV 8's, in flight, in tight formation, doing a flyby for what must have been well over 50 people. The flight took place exactly two months after the appeal to the EAA guys for their help at the Local Chapter 302 EAA meeting. A picture of Butch, hands raised in triumph, as he watches the first low flyby, through misty eyes, I am told, (well let's be truthful here, a hell of a lot more than just misty,) tells the story far better than I can of friendship, commitment, sacrifice, dedication and love, not only for a fellow aviator, but also of an 'old friend.'

We now have a flight of two identical RV 8's, dressed in polished aluminum and blue. They draw a crowd of admirers wherever they go. I call mine, my P Twenty-Five and a Half. Glad I didn't buy that P-51 now. The only thing different is the numbers.

Today, Butch has recovered enough to fly Bravo Charlie for the first time. I rode along in the back seat. . I am sure it will not be his last.

It was another 'misty' day.

It takes a long time to become an 'old friend.'

*-<https://vansairforce.net/articles/OfNewAirplanesAndOldFriends.htm>
(12/17/21)*



*Here is a shot of Butch Carr, David Hyde and Dick Kardell by Dick's RV-8. Butch's is completed now and waiting for Butch to get well and fly that sucker... The foto was taken last April in Conroe, TX.
-Billy Walker (11/2/03)*

All three of these great friends have flown west:

Butch Carr, 10/13/04, age 66, cancer

Dave Hyde, DEN pilot, 10/23/15, age 74, heart attack

Dick Kardell, DEN pilot, 11/24/21, age 83

Their memorial webpages are posted at

<http://FAL-1.tripod.com/ObitsPilots.html>

along with dozens of other “old friends.”

-Jake Lamkins

(12/20/21)