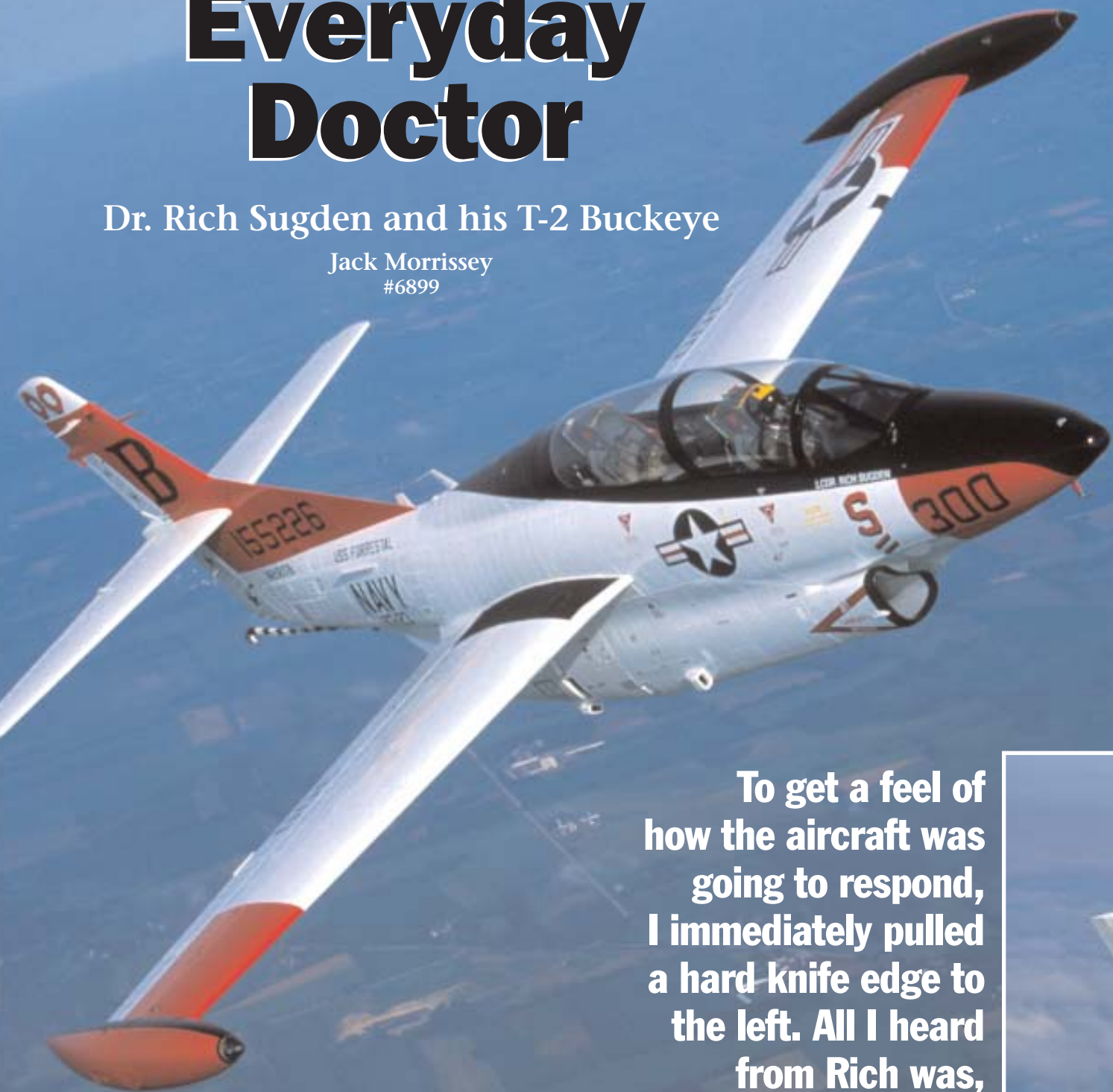


Not Just Your Everyday Doctor

Dr. Rich Sugden and his T-2 Buckeye

Jack Morrissey
#6899



To get a feel of how the aircraft was going to respond, I immediately pulled a hard knife edge to the left. All I heard from Rich was, “Get your (expletive deleted) feet off the rudders.”

Photos by LeeAnn Abrams

I can remember one of my first early meetings with Dr. Rich Sugden (WB #10591) of Jackson, Wyoming. Some years back, we were having a fly-in at Thermal, California, where T-28 Trojans pretty well dominated. Standing on the ramp, segregated from everything else (meaning the round engines), was this awesome North American T-2 Buckeye. Pristine in appearance, awesome in size, and looking very threatening, the Buckeye wore its original U.S. Navy colors. I found out that the T-2 belonged to Rich Sugden, whose background as a U.S. Navy flight surgeon led him to purchase and restore this Buckeye, used by the U.S. Navy for carrier qualifications.

Without saying anything to me, some of the other pilots had collected enough money to give Rich \$300 worth of jet fuel; their contribution got me in the T-2 with Rich, and words cannot describe how I felt. Fantastic! I had never flown a jet before, and the Buckeye would be my first. The bigger the jet, the faster the fuel seems to flow.

The seats were “hot,” so I had to work my way into the ejection portion of the gear, and then the chute. Fully buckled in, we went through a pre-launch procedure on some of the bells and whistles of the aircraft,

and in the event of an ejection, Rich showed me what I had to do!

Rich did the takeoff, retracted the gear, and said these magic words over the intercom: “It’s your airplane, Jack . . . do anything you feel like.” I took the stick, planted my feet firmly on the rudders, and climbed to about 6,500 feet. At

this point we were over the northern end of the Salton Sea. To get a feel of how the aircraft was going to respond, I immediately pulled a hard knife edge to the left. All I heard from Rich was, “Get your (expletive deleted) feet off the rudders.” I responded, “I forgot!”

So much for my round engine background, and my introduction to jets. I flunked the first test. My feet were back on the floor; Rich had reminded me in a way that I have never forgotten. He’s a great taskmaster, and I am grateful for what he showed me: vertical rolls and other rollouts, all with the pleasure of centerline thrust . . .

Becoming a Flight Surgeon

Rich spent his early years flying



with his father, who was a general aviation pilot. His dad held private and commercial certificates, and Rich said, “Beyond that, he really loved seaplanes.” Subsequently Rich started flying in seaplanes at an early age, and never lost the bug. He earned his private pilot certificate at the age of 17 at the airport in San Jose, California, while still in high school. He then obtained his commercial and rotorcraft certificates when he was 18. He even did some flying for pay at this young age for the local newspaper. College was next, and after graduating, it was on to medical school.

After his years at med school, Rich bought a Bonanza, followed by a Twin Bonanza, so he kept his flying skills honed. In 1970, after Rich had completed his internship, he joined the Navy training program for flight surgeons. Another new career path: onward and upward. While at Naval Air Station (NAS) Pensacola in Florida, Rich excelled in academics and his flying duties, graduating at the top of his class with a great deal of flight time.

His next assignment took him to NAS Patuxent River, Maryland. Meanwhile, the conflict in Vietnam was building. The policy then was to allow the flight surgeons to solo in a Beech T-34. Due to the T-34 pipeline being filled with cadets, the Navy allowed those flight surgeons who held a valid pilot certificate to go through the North American T-28 program at Whiting Field, Pensacola. With all of Rich’s flight time, he



Roadhouse Aviation

Tulsa's No. 1 Discount Fueler

RVS

Warbird Friendly

Airplane
TRUST YOUR CAR TO THE MAN THAT WEARS THE STAR!
1-866-530-FUEL www.roadhouseaviation.com



quickly mastered the North American T-28 with its big round engine, and as soon as possible he made a couple of cross-country trips.

After T-28 training, it was back to Patuxent River, Maryland, to the Naval Air Test Center, the home of the Navy's Test Pilot School. Rich's tour of duty there lasted from 1970 to 1973. It was here that Rich racked up a fair amount of flying time, coupled with the medical know-how that goes into the making of a military flight surgeon. While at Test Pilot School, Rich had the opportunity to fly a lot of different naval aircraft, usually from the front seat.

Most of us would give our proverbial "left arm" to have an opportunity like this, and Rich did all he could to enrich his flying skills while the Navy was buying the fuel. He put in a good deal of time in several dual-control aircraft—the Buckeye, TF-8, and T-38—plus he did a fair amount of helicopter time in the AH-1 SH-3, and others. It sounds like a very interesting life, from the perspective of those of us who didn't experience this much variety in our training.

The exposure to all of this variety led Rich to develop a great deal of interest in aerodynamics and military aircraft. Again Rich realized that he was being presented with the kind of opportunities that many of us never have, and it was up to him to make the most of it—and he did! Rich told me that he made a fair number of carrier landings, or "traps" as they are called, in many of the U.S. Navy's two-cockpit aircraft.

Civilian Life

After completing his naval tour of duty, Rich did his residency in family medicine and moved to Jackson, Wyoming, where he established his own practice [Author's Note: Some of us still refer to it as Jackson Hole, Wyoming, but on the map it's "Jackson"]. Expanding his skills as a doctor, Rich also ran Jackson Hole Air Ambulance at the Jackson airport.

Now begins the warbird phase of

1967 Canadair CL-41G Tebuan S/N 2202, N402AG



**"Tutor" Like Snowbirds' Jet
Pressurized & Air-Conditioned
Fully Aerobatic
Complete Rebuild 2002**

- Garmin 530 & 430 Comms/Navs/GPS
- 159 SOH
- S-TEC 62 Autopilot w/Pre-Select & Altitude Hold
- Sandel EFIS HSI
- Certified to 45,000' - MMO .80, VMO 470KTS
- Bose Stereo & Headsets, Ex-Large Luggage Area

info@jetcraft.com
www.jetcraft.com

Raleigh-Durham, NC
TEL: (919) 941-8400
FAX: (919) 941-8406

Redding, CA
TEL: (530) 226-3399
FAX: (530) 226-3398



JETCRAFT
CORPORATION



Rich's life. A few years after Rich had moved to Jackson, he met three pilots who stopped at Driggs, Idaho [approximately 30 miles from Jack-

son], on their way to Oshkosh for the EAA convention. Dave Clinton, Rick Fernald, and John Harrison were all flying T-28s at that time.

Rich thought that was great; he recalled his early Navy training days in the T-28 and started looking around for people or places that were selling them.

In 1992, Rich decided on a "C" model T-28 because of his U.S. Navy background, and purchased a completed Trojan from Victoria Air Maintenance in Victoria, British Columbia. For the next several years Rich made the annual commute to Oshkosh in his T-28C. Then Victoria Air Maintenance told Rich that if he ever planned

on restoring another aircraft, they would like to do it for him. The only other aircraft that Rich thought of at that time was North American's T-2

FLYING TIGERS WARBIIRD RESTORATION MUSEUM

231 N. Hoagland Blvd. Kissimmee, FL 34741

*Dozens of Warbirds on display
in a working Restoration Facility
and Museum*



Home of:

TOM REILLY'S WARBIIRD RESTORATION SCHOOL

Learn every aspect of restoring Warbirds back to flying condition during this 5-Day Hands-On class.

Warbird Restoration Students attending the November 10-14th, 2003 School will fly in Formation on Veterans Day with the B-25 and T-6/SNJ's.

Students receive a **FREE Flight in an Authentic WWII WARBIIRD**

CALL 407-933-1942

for Information Packet about classes and Special Events

www.warbirdmuseum.com programs@warbirdmuseum.com

"ORLANDO'S ULTIMATE EXPERIENCE..."

FRONT SEAT FLIGHTS FOR NON-PILOTS AND PILOTS ALIKE. THE FINEST T-6 TRAINING IN THE BUSINESS.

AVAILABLE EVERY DAY, ALL YEAR.



WARBIIRD ADVENTURES, INC.

KISSIMMEE MUNICIPAL AIRPORT
233 N. HOAGLAND BLVD.
KISSIMMEE, FL 34741, USA
(407) 870-7366, (800) 386-1593
FAX: (407) 870-2295



WWW.WARBIIRDADVENTURES.COM



Buckeye. Lo and behold, a genie waved his magic wand, and what appeared on the horizon? Yes . . . you're right. A year later a T-2 Buckeye project appeared on the scene.

Restoring the T-2 and More

The T-2 had been surveyed out by the U.S. Navy under its "Excess Inventory" program, to a Detroit, Michigan, training school; from there it had been purchased by a gentleman in Seattle, Washington. The gentleman from Seattle bought the Buckeye T-2 along with a Buckeye A-4. He concentrated on the A-4 and put the T-2 up for sale. Rich purchased the T-2, had it shipped to Victoria Air Maintenance, and the rest is history. In 1994 Russ Popel and his crew com-

pleted a superb restoration; this T-2 is the kind of aircraft that still draws "oohs" and "aahs" wherever it goes.

Rich followed that up with the restoration of a Grumman Albatross amphibian, and added a Mig-15 UTI. Aerocrafters of Santa Rosa, California, performed both of these restorations. Rich then became interested in the Vodochody Albatross L-39 training jet. Working with the Test Pilot School at Edwards Air Force Base (AFB) in its Quality and Evaluation Program, Rich brought his Albatross to Edwards so the test pilots would have the opportunity to fly it. Rich proposed a program using the L-39 for spin testing and as a low-cost trainer to supplement the U.S. Air Force's (USAF) T-38.

That program is still under evaluation by the USAF.

Meanwhile, back in Jackson, Rich delivered babies and tended to the medical needs of area families from cradle to grave, as he expressed it. Combining aviation with medicine comes naturally to a flight surgeon, of course, so you won't be too surprised to learn that Rich created an air ambulance service that has been instrumental in saving lives in the isolated towns of Wyoming, eastern Idaho, and southern Montana. This service has encompassed more than a thousand flights in 12 years, utilizing at least 12 different aircraft, including helicopters.

Rich sold Jackson Aviation when he moved to Driggs to become the FBO there. Driggs provides longer runways, plus a little more isolation from the general aviation sector that flies into Jackson. Teton Aviation Center located on the Driggs, Idaho, airport is now home to the Dr. Sugden Museum, which currently contains one of the better collections west of the Mississippi. In its hangar you will find the following warbirds: Mig-15 and -17, T-2 Buckeye, L-39, Alpha Jet, U.S. Navy N3N, FJ4 Fury, SNJ, T-28, and T-34. Except for the TA-4, Rich has one example of every U.S. Navy training aircraft.

Besides the museum, the FBO has a fabulous restaurant; a flight school, which includes glider instruction; and some of the world's most beautiful scenery. Rich also developed a warbird training program for new warbird owners. Led by Rich, John Harrison, and Dave Clinton, the first class of the Aero Vodochody ground school met this past June.

Rich has devoted the last 40 years to what he loves: his family, his friends, the field of medicine, and flying! His collection of warbird aircraft is the envy of many. His flying abilities have the respect of the entire warbird community, and the list of his grateful patients is much too long for this magazine. He certainly deserves a hearty United States Navy, "Well done." ✈