BOXCAR BULLETIN

EDITION JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER 2024 PRICE 5¢

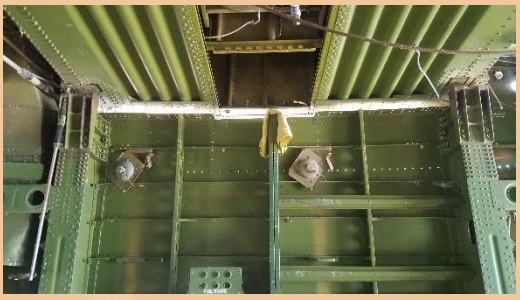
☆☆ Rolling Boxcar Updates ☆☆

"Stewardship"

Our stated mission is to find stories of American military veterans, with particular emphasis on Alaska, and present them to interested folks throughout the country. All of us at Rolling Boxcar are aware of the trust that our members give us, and we work very hard to be worthy of that trust.

There are several ways that we respect your trust. One is to exercise care with the financial aspect of our work. We know the source of our income, and it always was and is a consideration in our daily operations to be sure to get good value for expenditures.

A fun example of that happened about halfway through the first expedition to Battle Mountain, NV. Initially, the expedition consisted of John Will and me, your faithful recorder of events. The dismantling operation had progressed nicely, having seen the safe removal of cowlings, props, engines, outer wing panels, wing root fairings, floorboards, and nose landing gear. The fuselage floor had been cut away to make an opening for the trailer frame that would allow the combination to be towed to the build site in CA, and all that remained was to



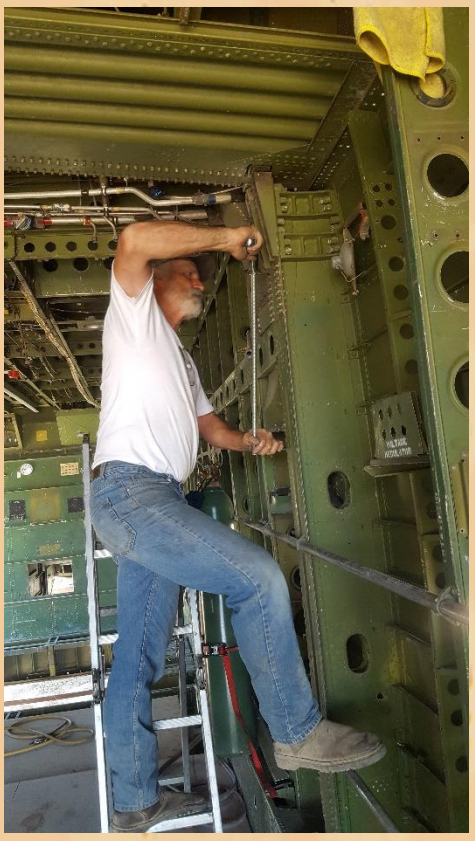
Rolling History to the Vets Who Helped Make It

separate the wing center section from the fuselage.

We wrapped things up one fine evening, leaving the hollowed out fuselage pod hanging on the wing with nothing more than the sixteen large internal wrenching bolts connecting the major components. The donated house trailer frame was parked nearby, waiting to fulfill its part in the coming adventure. We weary and sunburned Alaskans retreated to our motel. Later, over dinner that night, we pondered on the next day's crane rental. Breakfast the next day, and I spring my idea on John. Not the whole idea, just a cryptic comment that we needed to swing by Lander County Hardware first thing on the way to the airport. Nothing particularly odd about that, as this was a frequent stop for us.

I go to the all-thread rod racks, and pull out four lengths of 5/8" threaded rod, twelve nuts, and twelve thick washers. Then, on to the airport!

Inside the cargo bay, we removed one nut and bolt assembly at each of the front and rear spars, leaving only one at each corner still in place. The ones in the outside had already been removed. A length of all-thread was inserted in the now empty hole, a washer added on top, and two nuts jammed together. This left nearly four feet of rod exposed at the bottom, which then got two washers and a nut. Once the lower nuts were snugged up, the last of the original bolts were removed. Now, with the all-thread holding the fuselage up, began the tedious process of backing off the nuts at the bottom of the rods. After a few minutes, gaps began to open up between the lower wing center section skin and the fuselage sides.



"Boxcar Baloney"

Nothing is forever – except uninformed comments that have astonishing durability. There are folks out there who cannot accept the truth about their favorite topics.

In the world of flying machines, common targets of derision are transport airplanes. Sometimes known as "Crowd Killers" and other, even less kindly labels, they are looked down upon by fighter pilots, maintainers, headquarters types, and similar short-sighted people.

A web site with numerous entries about the C-119 has statements like, "The Boxcar was a one-speed airplane. It took off at 100 mph, cruised at 100 mph, and landed at 100 mph." To anyone who knows anything about aircraft performance, this is silliness of the highest order. It may sound cool, but the laws of aerodynamics assure us that it is not physically possible.

At lower gross weights, in relatively normal atmospheric conditions, takeoff will be right at 106 mph (with T-O flaps set). Cruise speeds will average around 200 mph; faster initially and slower as fuel is burned off. For landing, think as high as 118 or as low as 85, depending on weight, flap settings, and if you want to carry power on the approach.

There are many stories about how the Boxcar cannot fly with an engine out. There is at least a hint of truth in this statement, but only a hint. At weights of 72,000# and below, a -119 will climb with one engine inoperative - IF the prop of the failed engine is feathered, and the landing gear is up and gear doors are closed. At 72,000# and at sea level standard atmosphere, an engine failure with gear and flaps up will yield a positive rate of climb of 280 feet per minute.

In a remarkable incident in June of '81 a civil Boxcar suffered a severe malfunction of the right engine near Nettles, Alaska. A cylinder failed catastrophically and it soon became obvious that the propeller would not feather. What wasn't known until later was that as the cylinder pulled loose from the crankcase, it yanked the prop control cables apart and severed the oil supply hard line, so instead of feathering, the oil sprayed all over and instantly caught fire. Despite the very high drag of the unfathered prop, the flight crew was able to throw out most of the cargo to lighten the ship. The co-pilot and the four smoke jumpers parachuted safely, and after struggling for many minutes the pilot managed to belly land the airplane on a sandbar some 25 miles from the point of failure!

So, Boxcars are not really one-speed airplanes. And they fly pretty well after an engine failure. Here's a photo of Dugan's 'Miracle Landing' taken a couple of days later:

For the most spectacular example of baloney, I offer the remake of the 1966 film, "Flight of the Phoenix" with Jimmy Stewart (among many other notables). The remake of the same name came out in 2004 to generally mixed reviews. I attended the Anchorage premier, along with Boxcar John Reffett and JetBox Junior. None of us thought it was the worst movie we'd ever seen - the cinematography was stunning, for one thing. But there was waaaay too much call for suspension of disbelief. The landing at the drill rig was laughable. Using take-off flaps? Really? And gently feeling for the runway? Later, during the flight, an antenna just decides to fall off? Maybe if they had a few more people looking at the airplane inspecting the thing instead of polishing..... Then there was that 'engine failure' that in no way even slightly resembles an aircraft engine. I thought it was something off of a lawnmower. Having the prop come apart would rank in the range of possibilities like lasting peace in the Middle East. A broken rudder cable? Not saying it couldn't happen, but a cable worn like that doesn't happen overnight. By the way, when we have John's C-119 opened up for visitors, I make a point to see if our guest can find the landing gear lever. In the movie, it's a huge lever that gets pulled out about a foot(!); in the actual aircraft it's a small toggle switch on the co-pilot's main panel. And then there's that loooong drawn out crash sequence. The thing about Boxcars (and other large, high-wing airplanes) is that they squash during a belly landing. Oh, not always. On a very smooth surface, with a gentle touchdown, there's a decent chance of getting away with it. So, yeah, there's some kinda baloney there. Still an interesting bit of film, though, despite the 'flavor'.

We will our swag booth at the entrance to Garcia's Cantina during "Bear Paw Festival" in Eagle River, Alaska the week of July 11th. Also at the Alaska Museum of Transportation and Industry July 13th.

We want to apologize to all of you for not publishing an issue last quarter. During that time one our family of workers had a medical event come up that stopped everything for a while. We are continuing to work to get back on track and back to good health.

As always, thank you for your continued support.

We look forward to seeing you at an upcoming event this summer in Alaska.

Sincerely,

John Will, President