

Bob Buck

Bob Buck passed away on Saturday April 14 at the age of 93. His flying career spanned 54 years from first obtaining his pilots licence at the age of 16, until he retired as Chief Pilot of TWA in 1974. He started early, building a glider with a friend when he was fifteen. His flying career was remarkable for the different aspects of aviation and meteorology it covered. First, taking the Junior Transcontinental speed record in 1930 at the age of sixteen flying his Pitcairn Mailwing. Then flights to Cuba and Mexico in the mailwing, before joining what was then Transcontinental and Western Airline as pilot, flying the DC-2 and DC-3. There was an interlude during WW II, when he was asked to do weather research, with a B-17 from the Army Air Corps, and a team of flight crew and meteorologists.

After Howard Hughes bought TWA in 1939, Bob carried out some special assignments for him. He took a leave of absence in 1969 to do a round the world flight in a Boeing 707, pole to pole, with the famous Arctic explorer Berndt Berenson on board. He remained with TWA right through to becoming Chief Pilot, flying DC 6s, Lockheed Constellations, Boeing 707s, and finally the Boeing 747, retiring in 1974. I well remember a New Year's Day in the '70s when I was returning to the US from London, and he came in to the departure lounge at Heathrow, saw me, and came over to ask what flight I was on. Since it was the one he was flying, he had the Chief Steward put me in First Class, where I enjoyed lunch with champagne. Afterwards he sent word for me to come to the cockpit, where he introduced me to the flight crew, and where I spent the rest of the flight in the jump seat behind him, until engine shutdown at JFK.

Bob made no secret of his love for Europe, particularly Paris, and loved its art treasures, restaurants, and way of life. He was always keenly interested in gliding, getting his rating at the same time he went to Schweizer Gliding School to take son Rob as a teenager to get him started, and he remained a member of Sugarbush Soaring for the rest of his life. In recent years after he gave up flying he was often to be seen in the DinerSoar with Jean on Sunday mornings, shooting the breeze with members. After Jean passed away, Bob kept up his interest, and was never far away from the field during flying season. He was a prolific author, his books including "Weather Flying", "Flying Know-How", "Art of Flying", "The Pilot's Burden: Flight Safety and the Roots of Pilot Error", and "North Star Over My Shoulder". He had a writing style that reflected his easy and straightforward way of describing things and events. "Weather Flying" has gone through many editions, and is considered the standard on the subject for pilots. Bob is survived by Daughter Ferris and Son Rob. Our sympathy goes out to them and their families.

Pilots put in bids for the flights they want to take, usually some favorite route. To quote him in "North Star Over my Shoulder", "During my last years on the line I was number one, so I only had to bid one line, and I always got it. As the expression goes, "I could bid on Heaven". Bob, your final bid has been accepted. We will miss you greatly.

