

DRIP-DRY CHAMP

EAA Chapter 1414 jumps into a recovering project with both feet!

H.G. FRAUTSCHY



Left: Using a line attached to the tail wheel, Lee and a volunteer crew maneuvered the Champ 90 degrees to the hole, with the tail pointed toward the shore. Then, using a pair of long aluminum planks (not yet in place in this photo) normally used for scaffolding, he was able to slowly winch the Champ's main wheels along the inclined planks underwater. All of the recovery was done slowly so the water could drain out of the fuselage and wings. Holes did have to be cut in the wing to allow the water to escape. Once the airplane was pulled up on top of the ice to the shoreline, the Aeronca was disassembled and placed on a trailer. Hustled off to a heated hangar, the engine, instruments, and other parts were drained and dried as soon as possible.

On a late winter's day this year, Lee Hilbert was on his way to inspect a job project in Delavan, Wisconsin. Since it was a nice day and he had his Aeronca Champ handy, why not fly up, since the job site was just across the road from the Lake Lawn Resort airport?

All went well until Lee's approach to the airport. As he descended, the four-cylinder Continental decided it didn't want to take orders from the pilot, and Lee was forced to land on the mostly frozen Lake Delavan. Unfortunately, there was a thin section of ice in the inlet where the Champ rolled to a stop. After Lee exited the airplane, the ice started to crack and the Champ quickly wound up with the main landing gear in the water. The landplane was taking on water and sinking by the bow.

Now what?

As Buck Hilbert detailed in his column in March, Lee managed to cleverly get the Champ extracted from the lake, with minimal additional damage, but it still needed a full inspection and recovering.

Enter EAA Chapter 1414, based at the airport in Poplar Grove, Illinois. They were looking for a Chapter workshop education project, and in particular they wanted to learn how to cover an airplane.

They really jumped into the project, with over two dozen members on hand for the first Saturday's work in member Frank Herdzina's hangar. They were patiently guided along in the process of aircraft covering



Lee Hilbert got plenty of ribbing from his siblings when the Champ broke through the ice. Within a day or two of the incident, his brothers presented Lee with this "certificate."



Multiple workbenches gave small groups a single component they could cover, and Dip and Bill moved from group to group, giving pointers.



All primed and inspected, the wings are laid out on a pair of sawhorses with long boards running spanwise to evenly support the wings while they are covered. Frank Herdzina's hangar at Poplar Grove was the site donated for the Chapter 1414 Covering Workshop.

Carl Geiger looks over as Chris Fisher and Rob Fry heat shrink the covering on the horizontal stabilizer of the Champ.



Marty Gallagher and Jim Franseen are having entirely too much fun as they secure the inner fabric tapes to the structure of the elevator using PK screws and small washers.



All suited up and ready for Dac-Proofing and silver. The Chapter's efforts were greatly appreciated by Lee Hilbert, who offered prizes for the work done by the Chapter members.



Carol L. Von Bosse concentrates as she glues a reinforcement patch in place over an inspection ring. You can see the PK screws and washers used on the post-war Aeroncas, in lieu of ribstitching.

by aircraft-covering guru Dip Davis. By the end of the day, all the tail surfaces had been covered and the goup was well into the wing covering. By the end of the following week, the airplane had been covered and only a few more finishing tapes needed to be applied. Chapter member Lorraine Morris sewed up a new set of fabric and vinyl seat cushions, and others donated their time to other neat little odds and ends that helped finish off the project.

Then came the Dac-Proofers and silver, plus the finish coats, and by the time Mother's Day rolled by, Lee was well into finishing the reassembly of the Champ over at his dad's strip at the Funny Farm in Union, Illinois. We look forward to seeing it flying soon! 🐣



Jim Franseen and daughter Katie.

My thanks to Chapter 1414 newsletter editor Alex Van Bosse for his help in gathering materials for this article, and to the many members of the Chapter who put "Champ" back in the air, looking even better than before.—HGF

The father and daughter team of Jim and Katie Franseen (below, left) enjoyed the covering workshop so much, they wrote a short poem:

THIS CHAPTER OF OURS ISN'T
ABOUT CARS OR TRAINS
THIS CHAPTER OF OURS IS ALL
ABOUT PLANES

SO WHEN ONE OLD PLANE BECAME
SUDDENLY DAMP
WE HAPPILY AGREED TO HELP
RESTORE THE OLD CHAMP

WE DECIDED TO HELP OUT THIS
POOR FELLOW LEE
WE ARE PITCHING IN WITH WHAT
SOME WOULD CALL GLEE

ALL INVOLVED SEEMED SO HAPPY
BUT DOWN DEEP I HOPE
THE EUPHORIA WE FEEL IS NOT THE
SMELL OF THE DOPE

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS OR
FATHERS AND SONS
WE ARE ALL PITCHING IN JUST TO
GET THE THING DONE

OUR TEACHER IS DIP, ASSISTED
ABLY BY BILL
WITHOUT ALL THEIR HELP
WE'D BE FABRIC-CHALLENGED STILL

MY KATIE AND I HAVE LEARNED A
GREAT DEAL
PRIDE IN NEW KNOWLEDGE IS THE
THING WE FEEL

WE TOIL AWAY WEEKENDS IN THIS
HANGAR OF FRANK'S
WHAT A GREAT PLACE TO WORK;
WE ALL OWE HIM MANY THANKS!